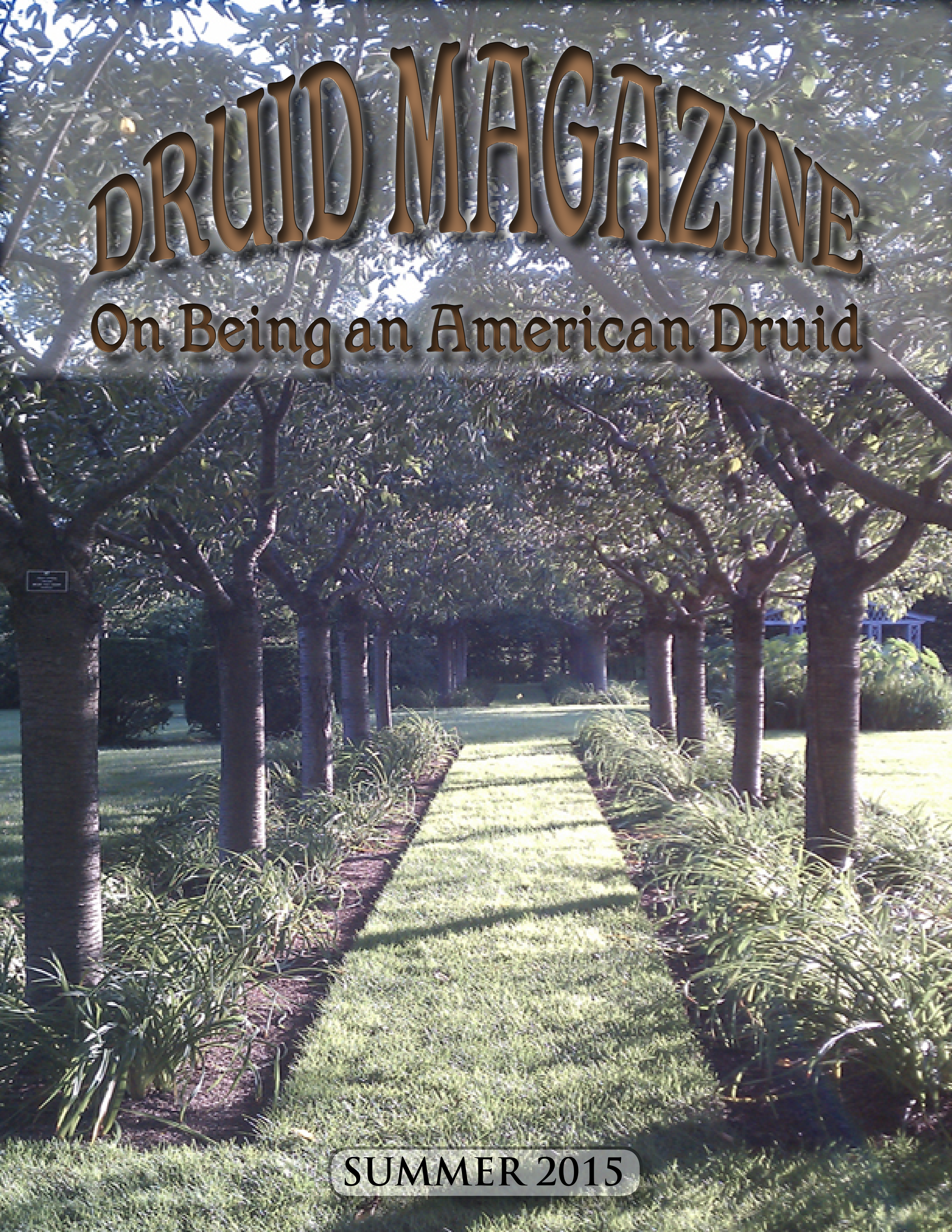
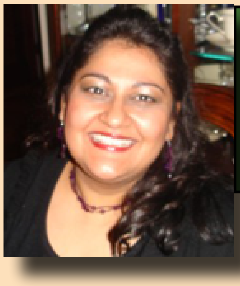


DRUID MAGAZINE

On Being an American Druid

SUMMER 2015



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK...

RENU K. ALDRICH

WELCOME TO DRUID MAGAZINE!

> *Druidry is the Western form of an ancient universal philosophy, culture, or religion, dating back from the days of early man when the three were one. It is of the stone circle culture, the groves of sacred trees, the circular dance. It has been traced by some as far as India in the cult of Siva… [But] Druidry has never been tied to the cult of any one god-focus; its members, earlier and later, seem always to have been experimenters and explorers in various lines of learning.*
>
> *~Nuinn/ Ross Nichols (2009, p. 19)*

Welcome dear readers to the inaugural issue of *Druid Magazine*, a publication created mainly by members of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids (OBOD) to celebrate what it means to be an American Druid.

What exactly is an American Druid? The only true definition is someone from North or South America who follows the path of Druidry. Druids are as diverse as the American landscape in which we live. Those who visit it from other countries are often surprised at how vast America is, and how each region has its own culture. Yet, we are similar, too. We are poets and healers, seers and seekers, and guides and guardians of the land and of our community—we are Druids. *Druid Magazine* welcomes the rich collaboration from around the world in celebration of the diversity within our shared beliefs.

I identify as a Hindu-Druid under my personal belief that both groups have common ancestry. Perhaps more importantly, the label signifies my own personal spiritual path. My parents immigrated to the United States in the 1960s, settling in New York like pioneers in true American tradition. Both lands—India and the United States—are part of who I am, my connection to the earth.

Climate and ecology vary widely in the Americas throughout the 8,700 miles that stretch from north to south, east to west. I have never felt this more keenly than when I moved last year from outside New York City by Echo Bay to Southern Virginia amidst the Blue Ridge Mountains. My landscape has shifted, and with it how I practice. It has forced me to be a seeker yet again, to find what makes this place sacred and to connect with local kindred spirits.

Whether by choice or by fate, most of us do not live in closed off, sheltered spaces. We enjoy disparate lifestyles, living in suburban, urban, and rural settings and working in all kinds of jobs. We are spread out as solitaires or in seed groups or groves, but the roots of our community have pushed through the earth to bloom in camps and other gatherings. Increasingly, we are connecting to one another through great distances at events or via online groups. Perhaps this movement parallels the growth of our community.

Of the OBOD's 17,000 active members, 50 percent now reside in the Americas. This figure does not include many Druids who are not actual members for several reasons—such as time and cost—much less those Druids who are members of other Druid organizations. And the numbers show expansion: In 2013, 434 new members joined OBOD from the United States and Canada, a 32 percent increase from the previous year.

Druid Magazine is a manifestation of this evolution of Druidry in the Americas, a meeting place for disparate voices to come together in harmony. Editors come from across the expanse of the Americas, collaborating online with each other and authors from around the world. I often call this publication a conversation. My hope is that it serves as a safe space to share how we live our Druidry, a place where we may share knowledge and insights, debate respectfully to gain appreciation for different views, and have fun along the way.

In this inaugural issue, we are pleased to introduce ourselves to you at the beginning of each section and to let you know what to expect from within these pages. In Ritual Space, we explore ceremony from both mundane and magical perspectives. Magical Crafting takes us on an excursion into the woods to meet a staff, just one of the tools many Druids use. Practical Druidry invites us to consider how we might apply our Druidry to our everyday lives. Going deeper still, Druidry in the Workplace examines how to build sacred space even in mundane office spaces. Druidry Online focuses on how some connect with their community and practice online. The Natural World, which honors the living world, offers tips for using wild-harvested herbs for tinctures and for seeking out seasonal produce. Healthy Ways considers the natural resources we can tap into to keep our bodies, minds, and spirits, in balance. Indigenous Ways explores the spiritual congruences and differences that Druidry has with Native American and other aboriginal traditions.

The Eisteddfod section provides poetry, story, and the results of the first Writing Contest. Many thanks to our special guest judges, Sarah Fuhro and Roger Arnold. Congratulations to the winner, Nimue Brown, for her beautifully poetic prose. Three other entries were so well-written and creative that we are delighted to publish them all. In this issue, we also bring you Reviews, which features both a book and movie review of interest to our community. Rounding out the section is Children of the Forest, our safe space for children 18 and under to share their creative works. One child shares his poetry and artwork while another discusses the challenges of being raised Pagan.

Find out what's happening in your area in the Around the Americas section. In addition to event listings by region, we offer glimpses into the activities of seed groups and groves as well as Camp News. In Memoriam, we celebrate the lives of Michael Paoli and James Bianchi, two beloved members of our communty. Michael helped us with this inaugural issue as chief researcher, and we are grateful for his assistance. I met James during the inaugural Gorsedd he led on the West Coast that kicked off the recent camp activity in the United States.

OBOD Membership in the Americas

		Druids	Ovates	Bards	Total
North America	USA	153	687	6,930	7,770
	Canada	20	59	496	575
	Mexico	1	4	16	21
South America	Brazil	2	4	68	74
	Argentina	-	-	-	5
	Chile	-	-	-	2
	Uruguay	-	-	-	2
Totals		176	754	7,510	8,449

Source: Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, as of March, 2015

Finally, in this issue, we present personal essays On Being an American Druid. In addition, we have a greeting from OBOD Chosen Chief Philip Carr-Gomm, a tragic tale of land lost to the government, and an excerpt from a new book on being an Urban Druid.

Developing this magazine has given me a new appreciation for Awen, which is Welsh for inspiration and divine blessings. It indeed feels like the three drops from Ceridwen's cauldron have blessed us. This collaboration would not have been possible without the encouragement, support, and hard work of many talented people. These articles come to you from 13 states and Canada as well as from the United Kingdom, in addition to editors from 11 states. This effort is made even more impressive when you consider that each one of us is a volunteer working on this project in our "spare" time.

Thank you to our Chosen Chief Philip Carr-Gomm, who persisted until I finally said yes. Both Philip and Stephanie are a wonderful source of guidance and wisdom. Deputy Editor Rob Pacitti, who facilitates the writing contest among his many duties, has been a passionate supporter from the beginning. I thank him for all of his help, including jumping into the chaos whenever needed. Website Manager Gary Sell has done a tremendous job with our face to the world, allowing us to bring the magazine to you. Chief Copyeditor Melanie Herd has helped the voices of our authors sing from these pages and has provided invaluable assistance on numerous aspects of the magazine. Thanks to Jason Parish, Brom Hanks, and Anne Hammond-Tooke for their artistic contributions. I could list so many others, including supporters and the department editors and the authors who have worked tirelessly to bring birth to this reflection of American Druidry. The very act of creation, and all of the time and effort it took to make this idea a reality, is a testament to the power of Druidry and a tribute to the depth and breadth of our community.

My hope is that you, the reader, will find boundless drops of Awen from these pages now and in future no matter how you define American Druidry or live your path. May light and dark live peacefully within and without as we make our way together on this journey.

Many blessings,

Renu /|\

Renu K. Aldrich, M.A., LMFT, also known as the Hindu Druid, has been a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 1998. She is a doctoral student at Virginia Tech, where she specializes in working with developmental trauma survivors and studies how to incorporate Eastern healing techniques into Western psychotherapy. Initially a journalist, Renu also has served as a communications executive in the publishing world, in academia, and on Wall Street. She launched Druid Magazine in 2015 in service to the spiritual community.

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Please send articles or editorial inquiries through the *Druid Magazine* website at www.druidmagazine.com

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DRUID MAGAZINE

Volume 1, Issue 1

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We are looking for talented:

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Tech Support

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MEET THE TEAM...

"I'm excited about being able to contribute to the Druid community by working on Druid. Already, I have learned so much from those who have shared their experiences in words and art through the first issue of the magazine. I'm really looking forward to collaborating with other Druids along the way."

Melanie Herd is Druid Magazine's chief copyeditor. She is currently in the Bardic Grade in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. Communing with animal spirits, finding inspiration from the otherworld, and connecting with kindred spirits have been some of the highlights of Melanie's journey. She lives in Colorado Springs, CO, and enjoys traveling and spending time with her family in the mountains.

"I am honored to provide web development services to *Druid Magazine*. My personal Druidic studies include an emphasis on Tarot divination and herbology. In addition to celebrating the eightfold year with my friends in the Circle of Coll seed group, I am pleased to work with Druids from around the world on this magazine."

Gary Sell joined the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids in 2006 and is currently in the Ovate Grade. He is a member of the Circle of Coll, a Seattle-based seed group. Professionally, he provides web development and IT consulting services through Sound Development Services, a sole proprietorship, for personal, local group, political, or business needs. Gary makes his home in Everett, WA with his wife Melody.

Dear Friends of *Druid Magazine*,

We walk together along an old and new path that is the OBOD Druidry, and the boundaries and distances do not matter! With all our enthusiasm we send you a peaceful and happy hug (hoping to have soon an opportunity to meet you too). Joyful blessings on our common journey.

Ciao!
La Redazione de *Il Calderone*
The Editors of *Il Calderone*, the
OBOD Magazine in Italy

IL CALDERONE

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BELTANE 2015

Disclaimer

Information contained in this magazine is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any chronic disease or emergency condition. Information, incuding recipes and remedies, is not intended as a substitute for advice from your physician or other health care professional. Please consult with your physician or health care professional before taking any medication yourself, or giving a medication to your infant, child, or other member(s) of your family. Before consuming herbs and supplements, please consult with your physician or healthcare professional, and carefully read all information provided by the manufacturer, including the label of any homeopathic remedy.

Three Drops, Three Rays

by Philip Carr-Gomm

What a pleasure it is to write for the first issue of *Druid Magazine*! There's something about being in this great vibrant community of OBOD that is just so exciting. Some things within the Order stay the same, just as the wheel of the year reliably turns, but each season brings something different—waves of energy flowing through the community and resulting in new initiatives, new projects being born.

Each fall, I approach the task of writing the Annual Review with some trepidation. How can I avoid it reading like one of the 20 or more previous annual reviews I've written? And yet, when I sit down and list all the things that have happened in Druidry and the Order in the last 12 months, I find there is always plenty to recount that is new.

Last year, I noticed an interesting trend—as if many of us were tuning into a collective call. Without knowing about each other's projects, groups of members in different countries started creating online magazines—and now there are at least seven OBOD-inspired publications. I know there are even more publications if we include the newsletters produced by various groves and seed-groups around the world.

How come OBOD fosters such creativity? I only realised today that the trio of people who help to guide the Order (known as the Triad) are an artist, a musician, and a writer—with Stephanie as Scribe, Damh as Pendragon, and me as Chief. That feels good, but I don't think that's the reason why there is so much creativity in our community. Instead, I believe it is because three powerful influences are at work:

1. A strong focus for us as Druids is on the Awen (inspiration). In our rituals we're often calling it in, and one of the central goals of the gwersi, the home-learning course, is to encourage the flow of Awen and to develop the skills of manifesting that Awen in our daily lives and our creative endeavours.

2. Humanity has reached a critical stage in its story. We all know how many threats exist to both our species and many others, too. Millions of people around the planet are waking up to a greater awareness—and a greater sense that they can actually be a force for good in the world. (If you doubt this, see Paul Hawken's book *Blessed Unrest*. OBOD is one of many thousands of communities on this planet whose members are committed to protecting the Earth and positive change—who want to actually do something creative that makes a difference.

3. OBOD works in a different way to many organisations. We use a 'radiant model,' seeing the job of 'OBOD Central' as one of dispersing seeds while maintaining the lightest of structures. From just a few rooms in different locations, the ideas of the Order are disseminated through the website, gwersi, the podcast, and Touchstone, and supported by the team of mentors, the Facebook page and group, and the message board. But in addition to this network, there are all sorts of other projects that the Order has inspired—camps, conferences, gatherings, seed-groups and groves, newsletters, and magazines. These are autonomous, initiated and run by self-governing groups. Rather than trying to build an ever-bigger organisation, we want to encourage and empower members to create autonomous grass-roots initiatives. This feels so much healthier—and it's what the world needs. This model is the one used by Nature and evokes visions of the gradual growth of a forest with great eco-diversity. This stands in stark contrast to the model of empire-building to which even many religions have fallen prey. This fundamentally industrial, mechanical model of growth slavishly followed by so much of the world, with its proliferating buildings, roads, and factories, is damaging our planet and no longer serves our needs.

So, take this radiant seeding model, add in the Awen and the Spirit of the Times, and you have a potent mixture: three drops, three rays. May these three rays shine through the pages of this magazine and on the staff of and contributors to *Druid Magazine*—and, of course, every reader!

With warm wishes for the success of the magazine!

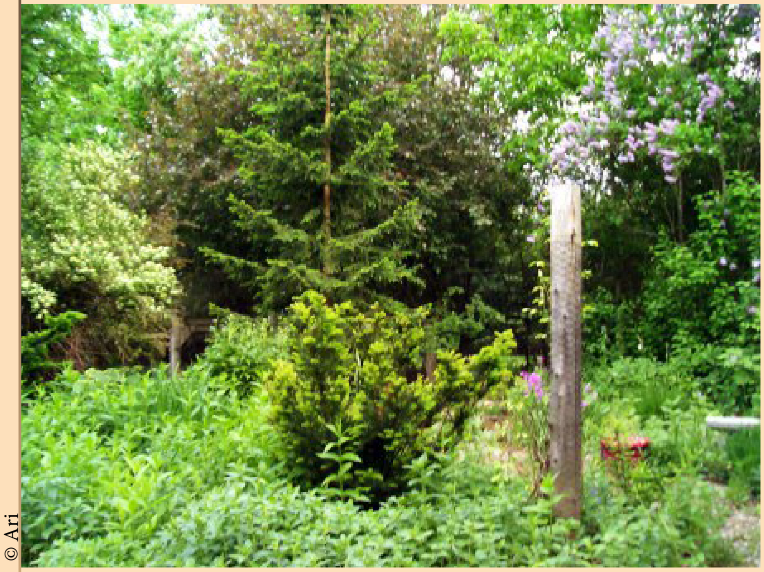
Philip Carr-Gomm

Philip Carr-Gomm has been helping to lead the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 1988 and is the author of a number of books on Druidry and related topics. See his website and blog at www.philipcarr-gomm.com. Philip will be returning to the United States in October of this year to conduct several workshops in upstate New York. (See event listings for details.)

A GOODBYE WALK IN MY WOODS

BY ARI

There are paths in the woods around my home in Michigan where a thousand daffodil and narcissi bloom in the springtime. Wood hyacinths, glory-of-the-snow, wild geranium, squill, and Anemone follow the Crocus. Half the woods are carpeted in myrtle, a gift from my grandfather, the other half in fallen pine needles, oak leaves, and pine cones. By early June, the path is perfumed with lily of the valley.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Here, a red cedar, dug from the land of a farmer, a grumpy old man with no running water who lived on the nearby river-bend; he was known for his monthly trip into town, his horse drawn ploughs, and his one working light bulb. There, a red pine, dug from my parent's second home, child of a pair that sheltered me while waiting for the school bus. A crooked but shining blue spruce, traded as a twig in a pot at a horticultural club exchange for a pile of daylilies. A now-majestic Douglas fir, cones standing straight to the sky, oozing pitch. The mulberry I rescued from a mulch pile at a local art center, only now, after 20 years, bearing fruit that I fight the blue jays to gather. Dozens of Norway spruce that came here as bundles of candle-shaped twigs, survivors of their second year, which turned out to be the worst drought on record of that time. I must have hauled a dozen truckloads of pine bark from a friend's woods to cover their roots, muttering prayers.

The blackthorn, one of the few original inhabitants, thorns out, wracked by black rot but still alive. The quince I hauled out by chain from a house in town, taking pity on it and the folks sweating in the July sun to dig it out by hand. The Chinese elms, a token of the respect I felt for my favorite tree on my dad's property. Here, the always-giving box elders, offspring of my childhood outpost, a quiet clump hovering over the creek behind our old house where I sat for countless hours amongst the limbs, hearing the winds blow and the multi-stemmed trees creak and waver beneath me as I counted minnows and watched the crayfish build their towers against the perennial floods. Here, a craggy royal raindrop flowering crab, flowers and leaves so dark one can barely tell the difference between them at bloom time. A highbush cranberry, twice cut to the ground yet with berries clinging on until late winter, when they finally sweeten enough to be taken. There, several varieties of now-mature lilac, scrounged from an abandoned farm, the dog roses, the multiflora, the bittersweet and ever so slow to mature trumpet vine from my first job in a greenhouse, a gift from the owner's wife.

Tucked amongst the English hyacinths, in amongst the tall black cherries, the white pines, and that stubborn maple, I built a small, open grove. Now surrounded with hostas, bleeding hearts, and wild violets, it is a quiet spot in a beautiful maturing woods, 30 years in the making. It was named an official Sacred Grove by OBOD some years ago, and thus it has been maintained.

© Ari

Foremost, and the deciding factor in my buying this once barren, sandy, dry upland, stands Mother hickory, who has seen at least 200 years, producing nuts every other autumn, her offspring finally old enough to be shagging their own bark and soon to begin producing themselves. Her children are here and there around her skirts and back in the woods behind the house thanks to my finally rebounding squirrel population. But my woods, in view from my front window as my joy in all

© Ari

© Ari

Hicktory Tree (before)

seasons, has been leveled to the ground.

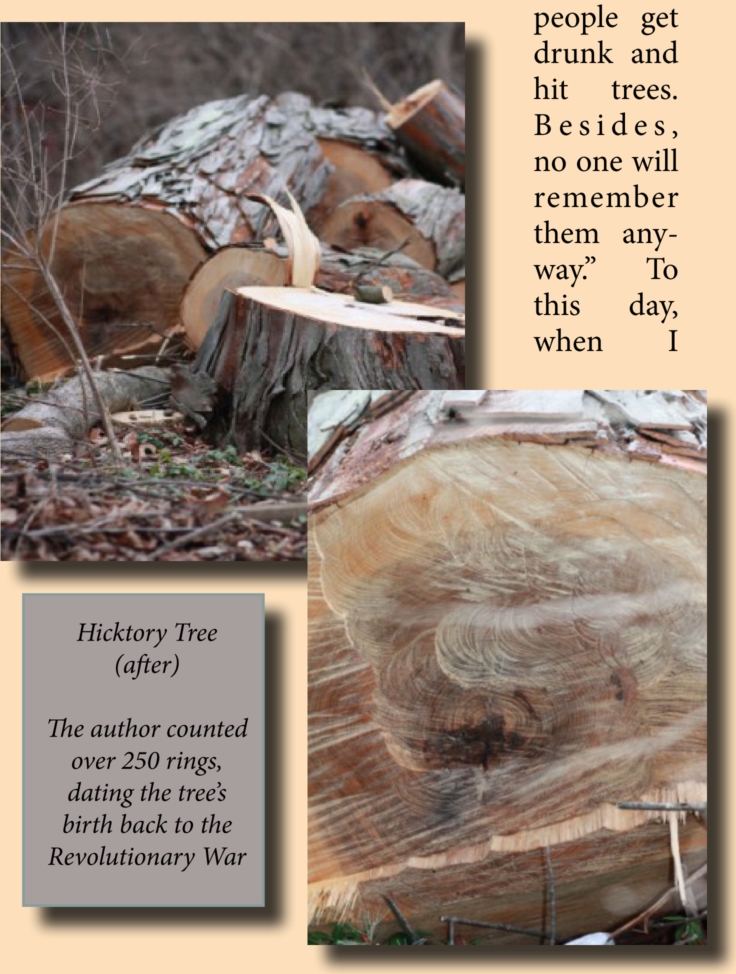
I won't even be allowed to replant these sacred friends because a multi-billion dollar corporation has stolen my rights and the rights of my neighbors. We have lost our trees and acres of land right in front of our houses. In some cases, right to the front porches, while, in other cases, even reaching behind the homes. We are told we will be compensated, but of course there is no compensation. The money is paltry, it is just a portion of the cost of acreage, and to the corporation, anything on that acreage is meaningless. We are told we cannot replant trees or shrubs, only grasses and wildflowers, or "crops." We will no longer own our front yards.

In my case, there is barely room within their boundaries for me to plant a row of evergreens to blot out the sight of what will be barren land. We will all drive to our homes, passing barrenness and stumps for the rest of our lives.

Some of the neighbors can afford to leave the area, many have already. Some are walking away from their mortgages, knowing the devaluation of the land will put them underwater financially. We are anguishing and sorrowing together. Myself, I have lived at or below the poverty level my entire life; this home and this land are all I have as an investment. For some, their homes are their pride, their public face, a symbol of their social status. Others, such as my neighbors to the west, inherited the land from their parents. The birch forest two properties down is being razed, and the young man there is so distraught he has been patrolling his property line with a shotgun on his shoulder.

Personally, this isn't about what I have done or will not be able to finish, and it's certainly not about appearances. Nor, oddly enough, is it about how all this work I have done has improved my property value. I still have that old fashioned notion that we cannot own the land, we are only stewards. I also firmly believe that the awareness of trees is collective, and that through their offspring and fellows they will remain. This is to me a loss of beauty, a loss of a shady glen in summer, a shield against the noise of unthinking civilization passing by at high speed. This is a loss of harvest for the deer, turkey, squirrels, chipmunks, partridge, and all the migratory visitors. It is a shared, collective awareness that will no longer be present, no longer tell the time of year, no longer labor quietly for the good of all. It is a desecration of the Sacred.

When I was an investigative reporter in the late 80s, I was assigned to report on the workings of our local road commission. When I overheard that several lovely old spruce trees were being removed from the sides of the road near my home, I questioned the commissioner on his reasons. He replied, "We get sued when people get drunk and hit trees. Besides, no one will remember them anyway." To this day, when I



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Hicktory Tree (after)

The author counted over 250 rings, dating the tree's birth back to the Revolutionary War

The author's woods, before and after

drive around that corner, I look at that barren area and remember—clearly, distinctly. I remember.

May the trees you plant remain safe in the arms of Danu, under the wheel of Arianrhod, behind the spear of Lugh, and may the Justice of the Hallows of the Ancients prevail.

Ari is a Druid in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, working in the Underworld tradition. He lives in Michigan, where he honors the land.

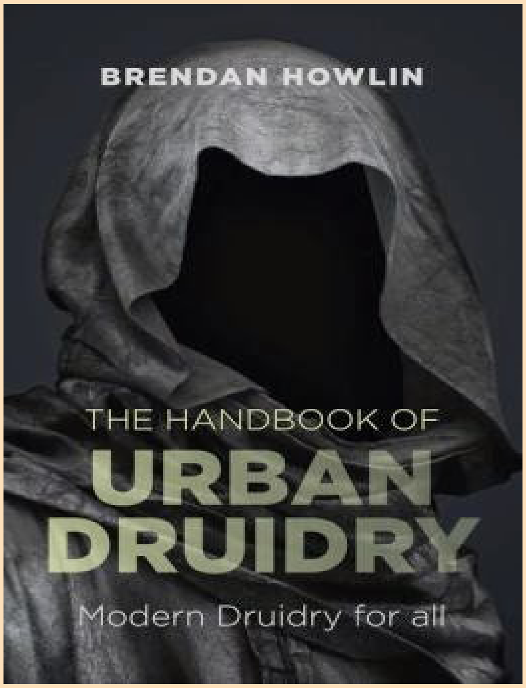
© Renu K. Aldrich

URBAN DRUIDRY
LIVING DRUIDRY IN A MODERN CITY

The following is an excerpt from Howlin, B. (2014). *The handbook of urban Druidry: Modern Druidry for all.* Hants, UK: Moon Books.

BY BRENDAN HOWLIN

If you have heard anything about Druidry you will know that is a nature based way of life, so how is this relevant to people who live in cities? Read on and you will learn about living Druidry in the heart of a modern city without a requirement for a single grove of Oak trees to be present. The best part of Druidry is that there is no dogma, there is no requirement to follow any of the precepts or ideals, you make up your own mind and do things your way. Hence it is a most adaptable way of life and is able to satisfy a wide variety of people and their lifestyles. So read on and find out what works for you. In essence even if you just recognise the problems that you have in your life you will have succeeded.



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The beauty of Druidry is that it does not stipulate a religious belief. You are free to frame your concept of Deity in whatever way suits you. Hence I know of Christian Druids, Buddhist Druids, Pagan Druids, Secular Druids and even one Sufi Druid. In this confused modern age, a way of life that respects difference is most important. Druids share a common practice not a common set of beliefs, so the Druid who stands next to me may believe entirely different things to me but we can still stand together in tolerance and understanding.

I count myself extremely lucky in that I can walk to work every day. OK, when it is pouring with rain for day after day, I don't feel quite so lucky but in general I am. I get to walk down the High Street and see the trees on the top of the North Downs framed by the street. I walk across a footbridge over a river and get to see the moods of the river over the year, from the slow thick flow of the winter to the quick brown spring flow. I get to see lots of trees. I see them come into leaf in the spring with that fresh green colour of early spring and lose their leaves in the autumn. I see birds. I see the swifts arrive in the early summer and see flocks of migrating geese in the autumn and all this in a town that is literally choked with traffic.

So take the opportunity to look around you and notice what you see, it will enrich your life, you will see more and more things that you have never noticed before and you will become aware of the web of life flowering around you. Ideally you should observe your environment over a year and take note of the changes that you see happening because next time round they will be like old friends to you that you are meeting again. It also impresses your workmates if you can say, "The willows are looking particularly nice this year". So wake up and look around you, don't let the beauty of life pass you by. The reason we are here on this earth must be to experience what is here, so it is never too late to start doing it and benefiting from it.

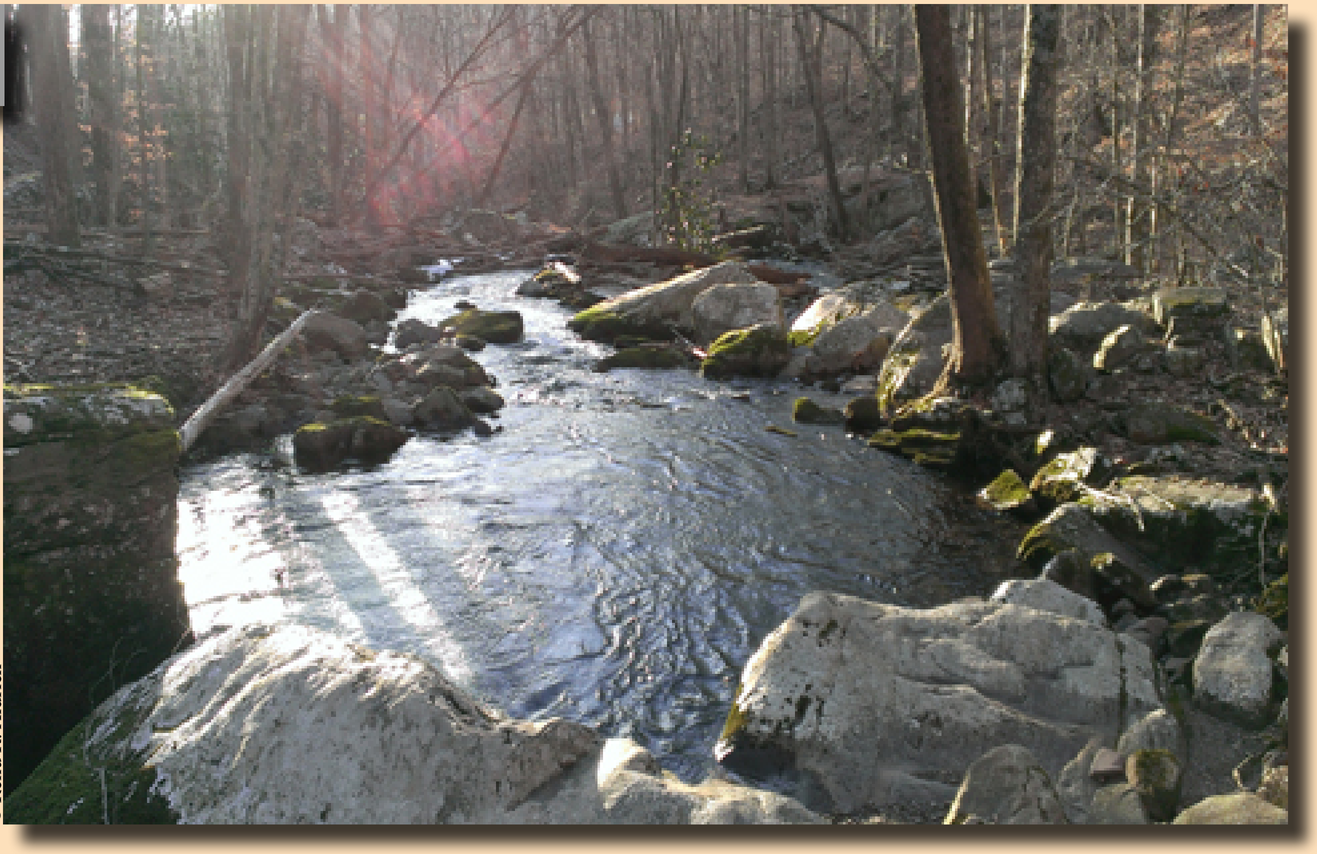
One added advantage of seeing what is around you is that it distracts you. If you notice what is around you, you can't walk along brooding about how mean your boss is to you or how awful your job is. This is extremely valuable because obsession is the enemy of enlightenment. When you are spending every minute of the day turning over your problems in your mind, you are not living in the present and thereby wasting your life.

So after you have been seeing for a while what then? The next step on the path of Urban Druidry is to learn to relax. It is appalling that this is the one thing that most of us have forgotten how to do, even if we ever knew how to. As mentioned above stress and obsession are the enemies of enlightenment. This is not to say that every Urban Druid is always going to be serene and smiling. Of course not, life is too genuinely stressful for that but you can go a long way towards reducing the unnecessary stress. Many of us, if the truth is known are addicted to a little bit of stress in our lives as it adds a bit of a frisson that we wouldn't have otherwise. However, we hear a lot about toxic stress these days and this has to be wrong.

Most of us have forgotten how to breathe, which sounds stupid because we'd all be dead but I mean forgotten how to breathe properly. A proper breath is deep from the diaphragm not shallowly from the chest. This short breathing is caused by stress. You have probably noticed this yourself that when you get stressed you tend to breathe faster and shallower. This kind of breathing becomes a habit after a while and you forget that you are doing it. A consequence of this is that you become tolerant to a higher level of carbon dioxide in your body and there is some evidence that asthmatics in particular have become habituated to this. One simple thing that you can do to change this is to breathe out more than you breathe in. This relaxes you automatically; you don't have to do anything else.

The next thing to try is to do a few deep breaths every morning or evening. Breathe in through your nose for a count of four, hold your breath without straining for another count of four and then breathe out by contracting your stomach and diaphragm. When your breath is out, lower your diaphragm to fill your lungs again. Repeat this nine or ten times a day and you will be surprised at the change in your energy levels. A side effect of this is that it gives your stomach and intestine a good workout and can help with digestive problems as well.

Brendan Howlin is a Druid grade member of the order of Bards, Ovates & Druids (OBOD). For the past 14 years, he has been a senior international tutor for Bards and Ovates and science correspondent for Touchstone, OBOD's international journal. He is also co-founder of the Surrey Druid Grove near his home in Guildford, UK. In his other life, he is a professional scientist and lecturer.



Cascade Falls, VA

© Renu K. Aldrich

WELCOME TO RITUAL SPACE

BY DAVID NORTH

Welcome to Ritual Space, where we will explore the many facets of ritual practice and what that means both individually and collectively, spanning the mundane and the magic. In this inaugural issue, Ritual Space Department Editor David North describes his vision for the column and introduces the first installment of a multi-part workshop on performing public ritual that he and his wife, Nicole (*Druid Magazine's* Reviews Editor), developed for their group.

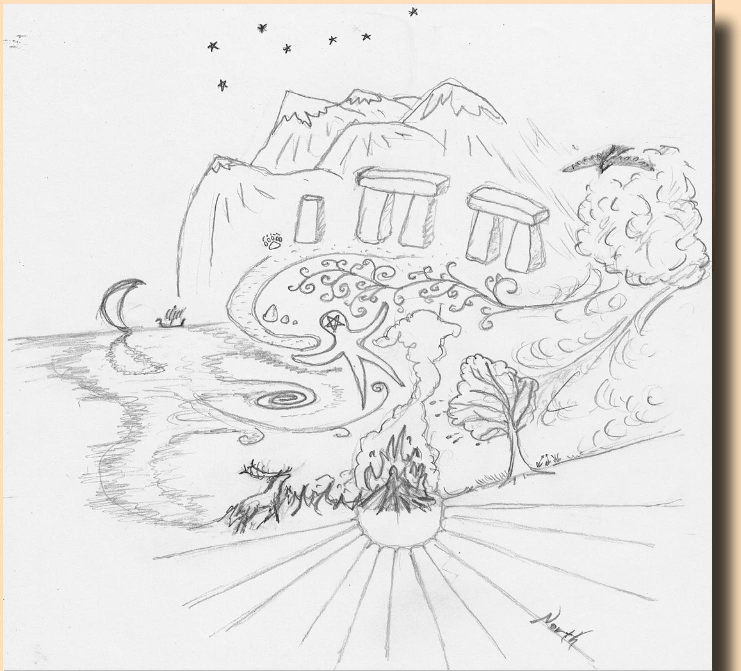
INTRODUCTION

Whatever label we have for ourselves theologically or denominationally, some sort of ritual observation is almost certainly at the core of our spiritual practice. Ritual can be as simple as lighting a candle, sitting silently in a room alone or with others, or pausing briefly to acknowledge place or deity. On the other extreme, it can be an elaborate ceremony involving dozens or hundreds of people, for an hour or for days, with food, revelry, and any number of traditions or practices, the origins of which may have long faded into history or been made up yesterday. Despite the differences, our style of ritual practice can hold deep meaning for us, validating our connections with our concepts of the divine and ourselves, with others and with the world around us. At its best, it is art, poetry, and inspiration all wrapped up in one fluid motion outside of time and space. Why?

We seek to explore many questions in this section: What ritual experiences have we had, good or bad? What elements of ritual practice speak to us and which do not? What methods have worked or not worked? Do you take liberties with the rituals you inherited from a group, mentor, or order, or do you stick to them verbatim? Where do you hold ritual space and how is it prepared? What tools do you use?

At least for the first few issues, I plan to segregate the Ritual Space column into two sections: The first will be stimulated by reader submissions and feedback, perhaps in reaction to some of the questions levied above. The second will consist of a series of installments taken from a public ritual workshop my wife and I have collaborated on and used with our seed group over the past year. It may present its own set of controversies! If you have ideas or comments, please feel free to share them with us.

David North is an Ovate Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, and, with his wife Nicole, is co-organizer of the Northern Virginia-based Seed Group of the Oak and Eagle. He participates with the group's public ritual team and authors or edits many of the group's rituals. Dave has been fortunate enough to have traveled through many parts of the world, including living abroad for three years in England. He is an avid home-brewer of mead, cider, and gluten-free beer.



Art & Poetry in Motion by David North

PUBLIC RITUAL WORKSHOP PART 1: PRIMER

BY DAVID NORTH

This will be the first in a series of six articles on performing public rituals so let's begin with its genesis. The seed group to which my wife and I belong is geographically situated in Virginia and part of the Washington, D.C. metro area, which has a large and generally familial Pagan community. We regularly participate in local and regional events and began receiving several requests each year to perform public rituals. Many of us have likely been witness to those awkward moments in large outdoor rituals when officiates, with the wind at their back and facing away from the circle, mumble something unintelligible into a sheet of paper…then silence…and confusion. So, after a couple of hastily assembled seat-of-the-pants ritual experiences and the expectation that public invitations would continue, we decided a practiced team of volunteers was in order and we created a syllabus.

© Holly Masri

Burning of the log at the Light of Bear (with Jason Stieber, Around the Americas department editor) during Yule.

Disclaimer: I would like to emphasize that our philosophical and stylistic choices are not conveyed as the only, the best, or even the recommended method for performing public rituals. In fact, while we generally maintain the essence of the OBOD ritual format, there are those times where we ask ourselves, "what would OBOD do," or (referring to OBOD Chosen Chief Philip Carr-Gomm) "what would Philip do?" Then, as often as not, we scurry about and do something completely different. So you should probably just rip this section out and throw it in the rubbish bin straight away.

But seriously, it works for us. Feel free to use, alter, or discard as the spirit moves...

What is ritual? The mythologist and philosopher Joseph Campbell once said during an interview:

"A ritual is the enactment of a myth. And, by participating in the ritual, you are participating in the myth. And since myth is a projection of the depth wisdom of the psyche, by participating in a ritual, participating in the myth, you are being, as it were, put in accord with that wisdom, which is the wisdom that is inherent within you anyhow. Your consciousness is being re-minded of the wisdom of your own life" (Campbell & Toms, 2005, CD 1.).

From Mr. Campbell's perspective, then, ritual is a reflection of ourselves and the wisdom of our lives; and, by extension, I submit it also involves the lives of those from whence we have come by blood or by milk. To me, that speaks volumes about the spiritual side of what we attempt to achieve in ritual. However, there is also a more mundane or mechanical side to that goal, which is the act of service offered by those creating the mythical environment and enacting the mythical experience.

For this summation, I turn to another of my favorite authors, Isaac Bonewits, who wrote: "As a young, Roman Catholic altar boy I was astonished to see how the exact same words and motions could be utterly boring or totally electrifying, depending upon which priest was performing them" (Bonewits, 2007, p. xvi). This difference, this art, this poetry of word and motion is what this workshop will strive to achieve. Until next time.

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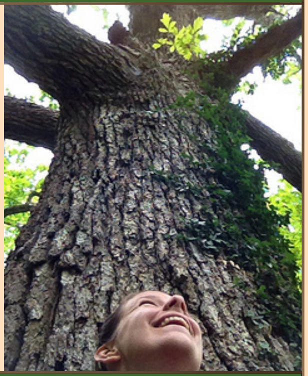
Welcome to Magical Crafting

by Catriona McDonald

From word-smithing to wand-working, and from iron-forging to spell-weaving, the Awen is boundless in its manifestations. Magical Crafting gives a taste of what other Druids in the Americas are forging with their hands and souls, and the many ways of treading the creative path.

Catriona McDonald is a member of the Mystic River Grove in Massachusetts, an Ovate Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, and a proud denizen of the Assabet River bioregion.



Hunt for a Staff

by Christopher Gorman

Have you ever stepped into your Sacred Grove mentally ready for the ritual ahead and physically prepared for the journey you are about to embark on only to realize that the energies swirling around you are more intense than you first thought? Or maybe that little bit of magic you are working on just needs a tiny push in the right direction to truly take flight?

I felt that way two summers ago. The currents and eddies of my life were pulling me and pushing me so strongly every which way that whenever I sat down to perform a ritual, I spent half the time pulling all the little strings of self back to me. It was really quite a frustrating experience, made all the worse by the fact that the more I focused on pulling myself back, the more upset I got, and the more little strings escaped!

© Catriona McDonald

Baring the Bones

Sitting in the middle of my Sacred Grove with so many strands of self splayed out from me that I resembled a seamstress of fate; I realized I needed something to bring me focus. In other words, I needed a tool that would help me in my rituals. I've used tools since I first started dabbling in magic and energies as a teenager, but always in the form of crystals, gems, and pendants. I had always wanted to upgrade to a wand or a staff, but I kept myself from doing it for two simple reasons. First, what if one of my friends saw it? Secondly, I've always leaned a little bit more toward "The Force" of Star Wars in my energy work than I have toward the "Avada Kedavra" of Harry Potter.

But at some point that summer of 2013, the true purpose of a ritual tool finally hit home. It isn't so much that the tool itself has power, because indeed what has power for you might be just another lump of coal for me. It's that a tool can amplify the nwyfre within you or absorb the nwyfre of the world around you to whatever degree you require.

What I required that summer was grounding. I needed a tool that would take the torrent of energy writhing around me and draw it into the cool strength of the ground. I needed an implement that would also allow me to pull strong and stable energy from the ground so that I could anchor myself during my rituals and work. In short, I needed a staff!

I decided to brave my friends' potential disapproval, and for the next three months I searched everywhere for a staff that was right for me. I went to occult shops across the city, in neighboring towns, and faraway villages. I scoured the Internet for something that sang to to me. What I didn't consider is that somewhere there was a staff that was also searching for me!

One day toward the end of summer, I went out on a hike with my 10-year-old nephew through the park across the street from his house. It's a walk we've both done many times before, only this time it was magical. We turned down a seldom-used path through a tiny marsh that led to a gorgeous bridge. When we crossed it, we found ourselves at the gateway to a forbidden forest. Ominous and dark, the pine trees loomed over us and formed a perfect walkway over a bed of soft fallen pine needles to an opening that seemed ever farther away. When we made it through the forbidden forest, avoiding any ogres and trolls that might have been lurking in the shadows, we emerged into a field full of silver trees and flowers. It was straight out of a faery tale. Crossing this field, with the breeze gently blowing the leaves and grass, the birds softly singing in the background, and the river trickling at the edge of the field, I regaled my nephew with the tale of Taliesin.

© Christopher Johnstone

Gift of the Fae

© Christopher Gorman

Waiting for Awen

By the time I finished the story, we were standing before the largest, oldest maple tree I've ever seen. It was easy, at that moment, to pretend we were the first humans in a 1,000 years to stare up at its boughs! We sat in silence for a time at the tree, both in awe of its power. When we turned to leave as the sun began to set, we stumbled into a hawthorn bush. I was quite excited by this because I'd just earlier that week been researching the Fae and their connection to hawthorn trees. I regaled my nephew with stories of Faery Folk and how, if you fell asleep underneath a hawthorn tree on the first of May, they would come and take you to their lands.

I explained to my nephew what it means to me to be a Druid, and at some point in the conversation, I started talking about how very much I wanted a staff. It had to be a staff as tall as I am—no easy feat given that I'm six foot six!—and it had to feel right. And as we were having this conversation and walking around a corner, I stopped and just stared. For there on the ground ahead of us was a thick hawthorn branch that definitely had not been there on our walk in. It was as tall as I was. It was a nice sturdy thickness. And above all, it felt right.

Hawthorn is often feared as a gateway to the Faery Realm, and warnings of sickness, death, and loss for those who pick its branches abound. However, it also symbolizes facing personal demons and giving you strength to face and overcome your fears. At the time, I had enough fears to scare away an army! Serendipitously, Celtic astrology books had informed me that hawthorn is my sign. So I took the branch that the Universe had offered me as my staff, and that day I learned my first and most valuable lesson about ritual tools: If you open yourself up to the possibilities, the right tool will pick you.

Christopher Gorman has been practicing Druidry on his own personal path for the past 13 years at his home in Toronto. He is excited to have finally connected with other Druids and found a home within the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids.

WELCOME TO PRACTICAL DRUIDRY

BY MOSS MAGILL

Hello and welcome to the Practical Druidry department of *Druid Magazine*! On these pages, you will find articles that recount how our brothers and sisters have personally applied Druidry in their lives, including reports of Awen-inspired stewardship of the land, profound revelations in self-understanding, stories of those who have pushed the envelope of social reform, and anything else that shows us how Druidry can make a real world impact every day!

Moss Magill has been a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 2006 and is co-founder of the Circle of Coll Seed Group. Moss has served as a Druid/Pagan Chaplain during the Occupy Seattle actions that began in 2011, and he is now currently working with incarcerated Druids in prison ministry programs of Washington state.

THE TAPESTRY OF LIFE

BY JEREMY EDWARDS

"Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment." Buddha

I believe Buddha had a point when speaking about our mindset. We cannot change the past, so dwelling on our mistakes or failures can only lead to heartache and needless suffering. However, this poses an interesting philosophical question. What if you had the ability to return to a moment in your life or a moment in the course of human events and change one thing? What would it be? The people who answer "nothing" would be the most content and have the most inner peace.

To answer this question for yourself, you first have to understand what "life" is. Life is a series of ups and downs, lows and highs, and pitfalls and promise. Life is more than our fleeting existence in this world. Our life and our choices are interwoven into a universal tapestry containing threads of everyone else's lives. Our actions and our words have a profound impact upon the lives of those around us and, by extension, the lives of everyone around them. Life is as a pebble tossed into a lake; the ripple effect can only extend outward, but let us concentrate on the analogy of the tapestry.

Every tapestry is unique because tapestries are made out of individual threads. Each person's life makes up a tapestry containing the threads of their life. These threads are the actions and consequences that occur from the most mundane to the most profound. For instance, you could choose to wake up at 6:30 in the morning and die in an automobile accident, but by waking up at 6:31, you would avoid the accident completely. There is a saying that "no man is an island" and, with that thought in mind, no tapestry is a universe unto itself. When we interact with others, threads from our own tapestry interweave with threads from another person's tapestry, connecting our lives.

Going back to the question, then, if you had the ability to return to a point of time in either your life or the life of someone else, would you make any changes or would you allow events to unfold as before? Previously, I would have answered this question with a resounding "YES." There are many things that directly affected my family and me that I would have once changed, if given the chance: automobile accidents, personal violence, and untimely bereavement. However, that would not be in the best interest of anyone because those events were pivotal to other events that occurred afterward.

Changing an event in the past is akin to pulling a loose thread out of a tapestry. When you see a tapestry, sometimes a thread has broken and is sticking out. It looks bad and makes you want to pull that thread out, but if you do, you cause a chain reaction that can destabilize the integrity of the tapestry and cause it to unravel. There have been many powerful events which have shaped the course of my life and the lives of those around me. I don't corner the market on grief and loss, but I have had my share of both and still would not change anything that has happened. For example, without the loss of my first son, would we have chosen to have another child? Everything my second son has done and every life he has touched would be changed. I cannot bear the thought that he might never have been born.

Another example, though, is the most powerful event in the life of my family. Twenty-five years ago, my mother and sister were involved in a head-on collision with a man who was traveling on the wrong side of the road. Doctors believe this wreck acted as a catalyst for my mother's rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, and lupus. You can imagine the far-reaching effects of such a catastrophic accident, stretching forward over the course of a decade and beyond. One result was that I no longer had money to attend college. I dropped out after two years and found a job with a local company. Three years later, I married my wife and we had a little boy. I received a job transfer to North Carolina a few years later and, after a series of additional events, now work in a solid career field. If I had a chance to stop my mother's car accident, these events would not have happened. I would most likely have stayed in college, never met my wife, and would be working as a journalist instead of a computer technician. Who knows what I would be doing now with the economic turmoil that has occurred over the last two decades. Everything in my life has happened because of a chain reaction caused by an event in my mother's past.

If we had the ability to go back and change things, would we have the right to do so? I live by the mantra that I will never ask anyone to do something that I am unwilling to do myself, so I am willing to expose my life, thoughts, pains, fears, and struggles, if it helps even a single person reconcile some of their own questions or struggles. One of the most powerful changes I made in my life, while going through the OBOD coursework, was that of letting go. I let go of anger, pain, regret, resentment, malice, hatred, and most importantly, that annoying question of "What if?"

I could talk about the traumas that I experienced at work, and the pain, anger, resentment, hostility, and want of revenge that I felt though never exacted. Through this process, I let it all go; everything. Once that was gone, once I was clean again, I felt vulnerable and exposed, but I could look in the mirror and truly see myself. I could finally love myself, regardless of my past mistakes and hurts because I had forgiven myself and those who had hurt me. It felt as if a lead weight lifted from my shoulders.

I want to share this experience with others, but I do not want to force someone to that point until they are ready. That is something I learned in the OBOD Druid Grade. We are keepers of knowledge and mysteries, and it is our obligation to share our insights with others, as we feel it is appropriate.

Our life experiences make us who we are. Once a person understands this important point, they can move on to the next step of healing by forgiving themselves and others, whether they deserve it or not. Forgiveness is not a gift we give to someone because they have earned it. Through forgiveness of others, we aid in the healing of our own soul. We don't forgive to do someone else a favor, we forgive to do ourselves one. I believe the happiest person in the world is content with who they are. If a person is not content with the person they have become, there is always time to change. Unfortunately, that answer does not lie in the past; it lies at the heart of what they choose to do with their present. The person who lives in the present can have joy in the fact that each day is a new day to make their life and the lives of those around them a better place.

Portions of this article were previously published online.

Jeremy Edwards currently lives in North Carolina. He joined the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids in 2006, becoming a member of the Druid Grade five years later. He is best known as the author of "Brander: The Faerie Realm Chronicles, Vol. 1" and his genealogical transcription efforts with the Ohio Genealogical Society.

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DRUIDRY IN THE WORKPLACE

WELCOME TO DRUIDRY IN THE WORKPLACE

BY BARBARA POTT

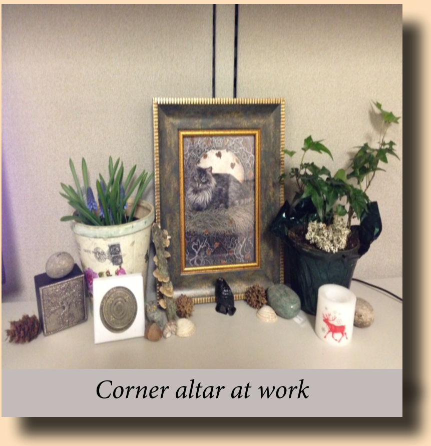
Druidry in the Workplace focuses on how we keep in touch with our Druid identity while we work our "nine-to-five" jobs. Tell us how *your* practice of Druidry informs your work life and how you stay connected to your Druid identity and values all workday long.

Barbara Pott is a human resource professional working full time at an automotive engineering firm. With former careers in non-profit and for-profit industries, she exercises her training as a member of the Druid Grade in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids and her pastoral ministry background to integrate her spirituality with the seemingly non-spiritual workplace.

SPIRIT AT THE OFFICE: FINDING THE GREEN AMONGST THE GRAY

BY ALICIA HILL-FORCE

A challenge to the development of a daily Druidic practice in the workplace is the energy and aesthetics of that space. One office might appear to be sterile, largely devoid of plants, pictures, sculptures, or any other reminders of one's connection to nature, life, and spirit. Another setting might offer a spiritually luxuriant landscape—a space pregnant with verdant green plants, the peal of Buddhists bells, intricate meditation mats, and rippling waters of stone fountains. Every space is unique, but each has the potential to help sustain and deepen a spiritual practice.



Corner altar at work

© Alicia Hill-Force

The idea of bringing my spirituality to my current working atmosphere has been a little daunting. But I find that a marvelous way for me to acknowledge my connection to the outdoors in this type of setting is by creating a desk altar. Having a desk altar is a wonderful daily reminder of spirit, particularly as my milieu has been a basement, cubicle, laboratory, or other enclosed space where the 'voice of spirit' was a little harder to discern. Some simple expressions of devotion I have placed there include fountains, small plants, terrariums, distinctive stones, pictures of a garden, arch, or totem animal. I may contemplate a single Ogham, rune, card from any of the Druid decks, or a symbolic concept. The only limitation is my imagination and the latitude of the office culture.

As a Cyber-Druid, I find it inspiring to use screen savers as part of my altar and have images that reflect my call to the greenwood and nature, such as images of forests, quiet lakes, plains, hills, and whatever else speaks to me. I use pictures that I took myself and transferred from my digital camera, or smart phone, to my desktop. A simple plaque, calendar of birds, pictures of wildlife, or Celtic imagery can transform any space (see sidebar).

At the time that I formally started my Bardic training with the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, I was lucky enough to be working at a naturopathic college with my own office, which allowed me a great deal of personal freedom in my studies. Ideally, first thing in the morning while at home, I was able to ground and center myself by doing the Light Body and the Sacred Grove exercises. However, if I was unable to do it at home because of time constraints and work demands, I was able to do my exercises either in my office, the largely unpopulated and quiet woods, or the lush and highly fragrant medicinal herb gardens and gazebo of the state park nearby. These places are very zen and allowed me a lot of time and space to contemplate my connection to spirit.

If time doesn't allow for this, I visualize myself as atree putting down very deep roots, pulling in energy up from the earth. As I imagine sunlight shining down upon my branches, I absorb that energy and circulate it. These exercises help me to attune to my calm, focused center. I surround myself with an aurora of light, asking the great God and Goddess for their blessings and peace throughout my day. I also bless my coffee or any breakfast foods that I have, asking that through their consumption I may be suffused with the divine light of Awen, peace, inspiration, strength, and vitality.

An integral part of my daily practice is the purification of space. In the office, it is often not practical to wave sage, incense, or any other burning herbs, so I established an alternative to this by spraying a hydrosol of pine, cedar, or sage in each direction while requesting in the name of the God and Goddess that my space be purified. Breath and air are as essential to life as they are to focus as well as our ability to be able to think coherently and be productive. Aromatherapy, such as scents of lemon, lavender, rosemary, bergamot, and mint, actively aid in increasing my concentration, focus, and mental clarity, in addition to purifying the space. Hydrosols often can be found at herbal pharmacies or organic markets (Mann, 2012).

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Office Altar

Alicia F. Hill-Force currently wears several hats. She is a Bardic member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids and a 3rd Degree British Traditionalist Wiccan. She is also an artist, scientist, humanitarian, environmentalist, social activist, land steward, and nature lover. She leads workshops on magical incense synthesis around the Seattle area.

TIPS TO DEVELOPING A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AT WORK

1) Scenery: Visualize your surroundings to help you connect with spirit. Anything that speaks directly to your soul may be brought into your sphere as a way to contemplate nature and the divine.

2) Purification: Create sacred space by purifying and delineating an area, creating a liminal space outside of time and common place to deepen access to the divine.

3) Grounding and centering: Quiet the mind and gain focus through the Light Body and Sacred Grove exercises, which aid the mind in preparing for the day's challenges.

4) Bless your day: Ask for blessings upon your day, yourself, and your food. This elevates the energy of all three. This practice is a quiet, rewarding, vital, and highly adaptable part of my day as a part of my anchor to spirit and the divine, and the call of fen and wood, tooth, and claw. *For a discussion of songs of praise in antiquity, see Grodley, 2011. OBOD's web site (2015) also features an article that relates prayer to modern Druidry practice.*

DESKTOP IMAGE RESOURCES:

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WELCOME TO DRUIDRY ONLINE

BY JEFFREY KEEFER

Druidry Online focuses on the practice of Druidry using technology, which can play an important role in the experiences of Druids, Ovates, and Bards. This is where all Druids, whether solitary or in a group or grove, can share aspects of spirituality and practice that are strengthened, expressed, and lived through online technologies. After all, we don't all live next door to other Druids!

Jeffrey Keefer is a project manager by day and (adjunct) professor by night in #NYC, where he constantly marvels that he experiences #Druidry more online than in the middle of the vast city. With a propensity for research, he regularly seeks to learn about and understand the experiences of others, and is thrilled that Druid Magazine opens new opportunities to explore and share these things with Druids online.

WHEN YOUR WELL OF WISDOM IS THE INTERNET

BY ISABEL CRABTREE

My husband and I are just beginning our journey into Druidry. We live in far Northern California, several hours north of San Francisco in a very rural, and politically and religiously conservative area. Literally, what we do not get from the land itself we must get from the Internet.

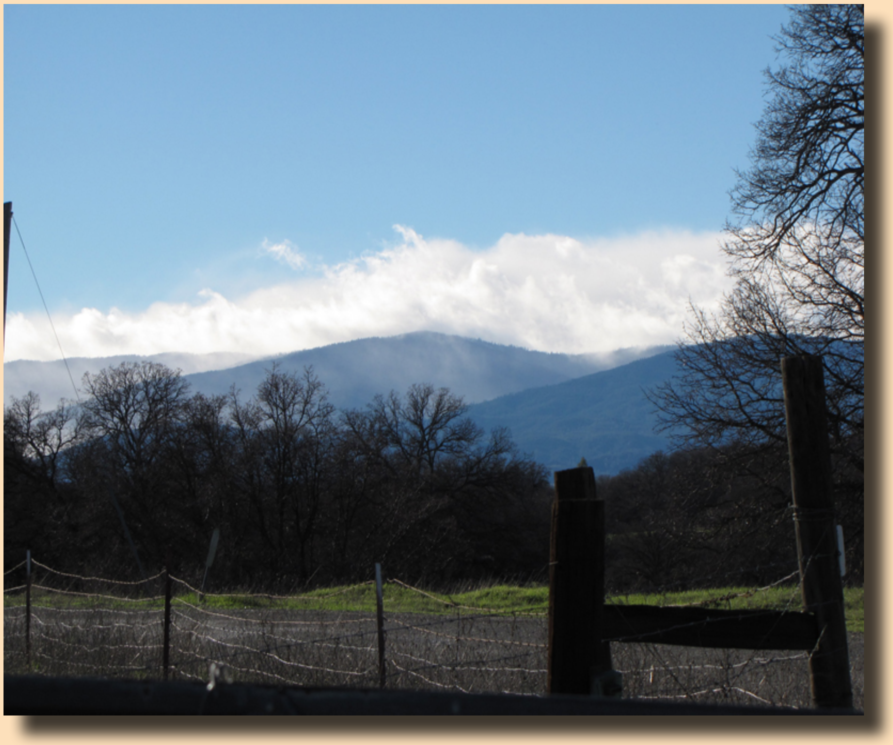
At first, I thought it was pitiful that we have to rely on the Internet, but we would have to drive over three hours each way to find serious students or teachers of Druidry to interact with. People seem to be too busy for group activities these days, so the chances of even finding people who have time to meet-up is slim. Then, I realized that with the distance and the fact that we are more comfortable with plants than people, having the entire world at our fingertips by way of the Internet was probably the best scenario we could have envisioned for ourselves!

Our interest in Druidry started when we discovered through my research into our families that we both have many Welsh ancestors. Looking for sources of Welsh folklore, somehow I found Druidcast, when it featured Kristoffer Hughes, the head of the Anglesey Druid Order. I purchased one of his books and then found the website for the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids (OBOD), and we've been immersed in Druidry ever since. The OBOD website is vast, and I'm fairly sure my husband has read most of it! That's just one example of the wealth of knowledge that is available online.

With books available with one click and so many websites to read, the next thing we sought online was connection with others. While it might not be face to face, I think any spiritual practice needs an element of connection with other human beings. Facebook was the obvious first choice, and we were not disappointed. OBOD not only has a group for their course participants and an "OBOD Friends" group on Facebook, but also has a separate message board. So far, we've been trying to keep websites and books simple, relying heavily on OBOD authors, groups, and websites, so we do not get too confused. We've realized that Druidry contains many paths and many subjects within it.

I've also come to appreciate how online groups are a valid form of community. I'm in my 50s and remember going to live groups and events when I lived in populated areas, but we are now more dispersed. Since I do not live in a city with a Druid group, I am grateful the global access of the Internet exists. One of the things I love about connecting with others spiritually online is that it is a global group of people sharing experiences from England, Wales, Australia, China, or any spot in the world. In that way, the online group experience can be far more diverse. What a blessing that is!

The Druid concept of Awen, the inspiration that fills us, can work through the Internet as well. Maybe the Internet is one big manifestation of the Awen; the inspiration and synchronicity definitely flows. I used to think that it was impossible to meet a person online and develop a true friendship. However, since beginning my Druidry work, I've made several synchronous online connections that have led me to like-minded people. I helped one woman find some information on her ancestors, and she and I have done a profuse amount of messaging back and forth about it. Finding people who are like-minded and "type-talking" is friendship; the Awen flows when two people have a common interest. Friendship and community over the Internet has become a reality for my husband and me.


© Isabel Crabtree

Another part of Druidry that we have been able to access through the Internet is music. Music can be extremely inspirational and informational, and Bards are an integral part of Druidry. They share stories and songs, and this again is something that is probably more accessible through the Internet. We have every inspired Bard and their music at our fingertips, and we can access their knowledge and inspiration whenever we like.

One particular aspect of participating in the online Druidry community that has been valuable is connecting with other American Druids. The American experience of Druidry may be quite different from that of people in the United Kingdom. We are a little bit jealous that those across the pond have access to the motherland of Druidry, whereas here our roots feel tentative. Few of us have multiple generations that have been in one place in America for any length of time. Cultural appropriation is a danger, too, because we live on the lands inhabited by the indigenous North Americans. We want to be as respectful of their ancestors and their history while at the same time we want to find ways to connect with the land and the spirits of place and make a home here.

All in all, I'd say that as long as we have regional get-togethers occasionally, being an online-educated American Druid with the "Worldwide Well of Wisdom" at your fingertips is a good thing. It is a new thing, a new take on an old tradition, a new branch on a very old tree.

Isabel Crabtree lives on a small permaculture site in rural Northern California with her partner Alder Burns. They grow much of their own food, harvest acorns and mushrooms, and enjoy the peaceful country life. She is also an avid knitter, genealogist, and herbalist.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

OBOD website:
www.druidry.org

OBOD message board:
http://messageboard.druidry.org/

Druidcast by Damh the Bard:
https://soundcloud.com/damhthebard

Facebook "OBOD Friends" group:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/obodfriends/

WELCOME TO THE NATURAL WORLD

BY ERIN LUND JOHNSON

Welcome to The Natural World, where Druids commune and work with the living world of plants, trees, animals, rivers, rocks, and clouds. We will feature articles on topics such as seasonal eating, growing, and foraging; natural gardening and permaculture; herbalism and seasonal herbs; plant spirits and devas; animist worldviews; and ogham divinations.

Erin Lund Johnson is a wife, mother, gardener, homeschooler, reader, author, poet, Brigidine flame-tender, contemplative Druid, and rainbow-chaser living in Cascadia. She is currently studying herbalism and permaculture.

SPRINGTIME HARVESTING

As temperate weather returns, we welcome back cherished garden perennials asparagus, chives, and peppermint.

Asparagus

Tender young stalks are poking their heads above ground now, a signal that warm weather is on the seasonal horizon. Asparagus generates from a combination of male and female plants growing in close proximity. If you grow it, you know it can be finicky and tricky to establish, but once settled, it is a welcome return to May's seasonal palette each year. Community supported agriculture (CSA) farms, farmer's markets, and local produce markets are great places to find fresh asparagus if you don't grow it yourself. Enjoy it lightly steamed and seasoned with butter, salt, and pepper, or roasted with olive oil, salt, pepper, thyme, and marjoram, then finished with a light dressing of white balsamic vinaigrette.

Chives

Chives grow in clumps of grass-like foliage, which will be later topped by bright, round, pinky-purplish flowers. CSAs and farmer's markets might sell bunches of them. They are lovely chopped into green salads, and classically sprinkled over baked potatoes. They impart a fresh, savory flavor without being overpowering. If you'd like to preserve some, dry the leaves flat in a low-set oven at 150 degrees F for an hour or two because they tend to get rubbery when tied and hung.

Peppermint

Peppermint grows with wild abandon anyplace it shows up, happily colonizing its chosen space. In the garden, you'll want to keep it corralled in its own pot, which can sit on a deck or patio, or be sunk into the ground in an herb bed or near fruit trees to help other plants to repel pests. Peppermint, either fresh-picked or dried, makes a lovely tisane or herbal tea, which is refreshing over ice on a warm day. It also soothes upset stomachs and relieves stuffy noses. Drying is as easy as hanging up cut and tied bundles of its square-stemmed branches, but wait to do that later, close to midsummer, when its volatile oils are at their peak, just before it pushes its energy into flowering. Small leaves of fresh mint can be chopped into spring peas, tucked into May Day baskets, or tinctured in alcohol for a healing digestive.

In the garden, all of these perennials will grow in both full sun and partial shade, and they like rich, well-amended soil. Chives can also be grown in a windowsill pot indoors to be enjoyed year-round. Its flowers are even edible, making a fun and colorful green salad garnish... Happy harvesting!

ASK THE GREEN THUMB GURUS

Are you a Druid whose thumb is grayer than green? Do you have plant or garden questions only a qualified Druid can answer? **Submit your questions** now!

CREATING SACRED TINCTURES FROM WILD-HARVESTED HERBS IN AMERICA

BY ROBERT PACITTI

Creating tinctures is a direct and powerful way to use the sacred essence of herbs for both health and well-being. While it has become common for crafters to purchase herbs from vendors and Internet warehouses, we have a unique opportunity to connect directly with our local land and learn about the subtleties of the delicate ecosystems that surround us. Wild-harvesting is essentially the practice of collecting plant or fungal material from its native habitat, and as Americans, we can take advantage of the vast and often untamed bounty that our homeland provides.

Safety must be the number-one concern when venturing out in to the natural world with the intent of consumption, and there are many detailed field guides designed for the purpose of wild-harvesting herbs. I have found that the Peterson Field Guides, *A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants and Herbs: Of Eastern and Central North America* (Foster & Duke, 1999), and *A Field Guide to Western Medicinal Plants and Herbs* (Hobbs & Foster, 2002) offer a comprehensive and easy-to-use format for this purpose. I also implore novice wild-harvesters to do their own extensive research before ingesting anything. Permaculturists often incorporate extensive knowledge of wild-harvesting and foraging into their studies; often local permaculture groups that can be found using websites such as www.meetup.com and www.bigtent.com in most parts of the country. There is no resource as valuable as a trained eye!

When thinking of the tools used to gather herbs, we often harken back to the image of a bearded Druid using his golden sickle (boline) to cut sacred mistletoe. While a pair of garden shears or even a pocket knife will suffice, I have found that using a traditional boline offers an added level of experiential connection to the act of wild-harvesting that can make the event even more profound. An added advantage of using a boline is that its design is not only excellent for harvesting herbs, but it is also highly effective at preparing herbs for making tinctures (as I present later in the directions for creating a tincture). In addition to your cutting tool, I would suggest crafting or purchasing a bag specifically used for your wild-harvested herbs. Beyond the spiritual ramifications of a dedicated sacred collection space, many

TINCTURE RECIPE: PEPPERMINT

Three common wild herbs found in North America are mint, mullein, and plantain. These herbs should be easy to locate, and can provide an excellent entrance into the wonderful world of crafting wild-harvested tinctures!

Here are the basic ingredients required for these three tincture recipes:

- 4 oz. glass jar with sealable lid
- Enough plant material to loosely pack your jar
- 3½ to 4 oz. of your solution (alcohol of at least 80 proof or vinegar)

PEPPERMINT TINCTURE

Effects: Mint is an excellent tincture for soothing digestive issues of all kinds.

Where to find: An aromatic herb, mint is a prolific species, which spreads quickly once established. It grows in partial shade to sun, and is often found along hedges and other natural boundaries.

Part of the plant to use: Leaves, preferably before the plant flowers.

insects call these plants home, and on more than one occasion I have inadvertently welcomed several stowaways for an extended stay.

It is best to wild-harvest herbs in the mid-morning after the dew has evaporated, but before the afternoon sun cooks away their essential oils. These oils are what will give your tincture its potency. Make sure that the herbs are of the correct maturity for harvesting, are in good health, and have not been exposed to any kind of chemical treatment. When harvesting leaves, avoid choosing the largest because this could kill the plant by removing its ability to photosynthesize effectively. Herbalist Jim McDonald (n.d.) produced a practical post on the subject that also offers an overview of when to gather different parts of the herb. At the time of harvest, you may want to gift a small offering, rite, or meditation to the plant, asking for its permission to reap the rewards of its sacred essence.

When wild-harvesting herbs for tincture, the best amount to gather is the least amount that you can get away with. Respect for the land is a fundamental aspect of modern Druidry, and while wild-harvesting is completely in line with Druid philosophy, ravaging an ecosystem is not. Through trial and error, I have found that a large handful of herbs will provide you with plenty of usable material for a four-ounce jar of tincture. Transferring the seasoned tincture to a few single-ounce dropper bottles will last you over a month of consistent use. The most economical way to purchase these jars and dropper bottles is in bulk from sites such as www.specialitybottle.com or www.amazon.com. By ordering in bulk, you also avoid the added environmental impact of individual packaging.

A tincture is simply a concentrated extract that uses alcohol to pull the vital nutrients from your wild-harvested material into liquid form. Vinegar can be used in its place, but alcohol is far more effective at drawing out the important properties of the herb. Tinctures created by alcohol have a shelf life of up to two years longer than those made with vinegar.

Directions for Making a Tincture

Transmuting the wild-harvested herbs into a healthful tincture is a simple process that will require a few more supplies:

Alcohol of at least 80 proof (Everclear® works best, but vodka can be substituted)
4 oz. glass jars with tight-fitting lids
1 oz. dropper bottles (amber or brown glass)
Cheesecloth
A small funnel

Begin by gently rinsing your herbs with warm water to remove any dirt or debris. Using the cutting edge of the boline, separate the herbs and make sure that you are using only the parts of the plant that are required by the recipe. You do not need to dice the herbs into fine pieces; just cut them enough to make them fit

TINCTURE RECIPES: MULLEIN & PLANTAIN

MULLEIN TINCTURE

Effects: Mullein tincture aids in any issue involving the lymphatic system.

Where to find: The tall mullein plant is easy to spot and can often be found in poor soil.

Part of the plant to use: Flowers.

PLANTAIN TINCTURE

Effects: Plantain is considered a multi-functioning "panacea" herb, but the tincture is most often used for soothing mucous membranes and removing toxins from the body.

Where to find: Often considered a common weed, plantain can be found in parks, clearings, or even your backyard!

Part of the plant to use: Leaves and flowers.

snugly into your jar. Fill your freshly washed jar about three-quarters of the way with your herbs, and avoid packing the material down because you want the alcohol to come into contact with all of the plant material. Fill the jar to the brim with the Everclear, and seal the lid. Give the solution a good shake to mix up the contents, and then store in a cool, dry place. Continue to shake the tincture jar daily, and, in three to six weeks, your sacred tincture will be ready for consumption.

Once your tincture is seasoned, prepare your cheesecloth, funnel, and dropper bottles. After placing the funnel into the dropper bottle, unscrew the jar and filter the tincture through the cheesecloth until the bottle is full. If there are many fine particles in the jar, I suggest using two layers of cheesecloth. You can either prepare the dropper bottles all at once, or as needed, which will increase the potency of the tincture with each preparation. My standard dosage for a concentrated tincture is 15–25 drops twice daily, but feel free to experiment with what feels right to you.

Incorporating this process into a ritual space often enhances the experience and offers the opportunity to bring blessings and focus to your sacred tincture. While there are several resources that give guidance on assimilating sacred herbal medicine into your personal spiritual routine, I recommend starting with American Druid Ellen Evert Hopman's book, *A Druid's Herbal for the Sacred Earth Year* (1994). Hopman does an excellent job of tying the properties and lore of many herbal recipes into a practical calendar format for the modern Druid.

As we travel on our individual path into the wild, do not be afraid to look down and see what our friends from the plant realm have to offer. Whether it is healing, well-being, or infusing their sacred essences into our own, wild-harvested sacred herbal tinctures can certainly provide a powerful tool for connecting with the natural world.

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GROWING SEASON RESOURCES

BY ERIN LUND JOHNSON

For Druids who revere and seek to live in harmony with the natural world, part of harmonious living means consciously and ethically sourcing our food. Eating in-season keeps us in sync with the rhythms of the land. Eating local stock and produce allows us to take in the spirit and terroir of the land where we each live.

In addition to spiritual engagement, eating seasonally and locally reduces food transportation, which cuts down on fossil fuel extraction and pollution. Community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms, farmer's markets, and regional farmer stands provide us with an opportunity to form relationships with farmers and to learn firsthand how our food is grown or raised.

When we treat food and food sources with respect, we honor those plants and animals who give their lives up for ours, and we honor the living land that supports us all.

Check out these sites to help you source local food or learn what's in season where you live throughout the year.

Field to Plate

http://www.fieldtoplate.com/guide/

Sustainable Table

http://www.sustainabletable.org/seasonalguide/seasonalfoodguide.php

Local Harvest

http://www.localharvest.org/

KEEPING YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY HEALTHY NATURALLY

BY SHELLEY KENEIPP

As an Erickson hypnotist for 25 years, I have used hypnotism to help people stop smoking, avert second heart attacks, lower blood pressure, reduce stress, boost immunity (in AIDS patients), eliminate psychogenic illness, eliminate phobias, and reduce pain, as well as to aid mothers in the birthing process. I held several roles during this time, including as guest lecturer at the Neuropsychiatric Institute at UCLA.

While I was successfully helping people with hypnotism, I wanted to do more. Seeing first hand some of the negative side effects people were receiving from pharmaceutical drugs, I went searching for a modality in the natural, as opposed to the chemical, realm. I became impressed with results my daughter received from taking the homeopathic remedy Pulsatilla. All of her symptoms of wild "up-and-down" moodiness completely disappeared from one dose of this remedy; her temperament became balanced and even again. It was magical!

I decided to pursue the study of homeopathy in England in 1994 because there its use is mainstream compared with the United States. The Queen Mother has her own personal homeopath and Royal Family members typically live long and healthy lives (National Center for Homeopathy, 2015; Ullman, 2007). One of my homeopathic teachers introduced me to The Druid Order, An Druidh Uileach Braithreachas; when I was initiated as a Companion myself later, I soon realized that my studies in both areas complemented each other. Homeopathy is a great modality for those who practice Druidry to use for themselves and their families because it is safe, harmless, effective, non-toxic, renewable, and ecologically sustainable (National Center for Homeopathy, 2015). It is called "green medicine" because its use is synergistic with good health and planetary well-being, and practitioners operate under the belief that human and global environmental health are intricately linked.

Hippocrates, a Greek physician born in 460 B.C.E., is considered the father of medicine. He stated that there are two ways to treat ill health: the Law of Opposites and the Law of Similars (Ullman, 1993). In 1796, German doctor Samuel Hahnemann based his approach to healing utilizing the Law of Similars and, thus, homeopathy was born. The word homeopathy comes from the Greek words *homoios* and *patheia*, which translates into "similar suffering."

Homeopathy is based on the principle that like cures like, which utilizes the Law of Similars. Suppose a person has a cold with watery eyes and a burning nasal discharge. In this case, the remedy *Allium cepa* (Latin for onion) might be given because onion is known to cause watery eyes and a burning nasal discharge. Homeopathic principles see symptoms as a representation of the body's attempt to restore health. On the other hand, Western medicine, also known as allopathic, incorporates the Law of Opposites: a cold is treated by giving either a drug to dry mucous in the nose, a drug to bring down the fever, or a cough syrup to suppress the cough.

Homeopathic practitioners treat the whole person by looking at physical, emotional, and mental symptoms. We all suffer from ill health in our own unique way, so a remedy is chosen based on our unique symptoms. For instance, are you chilly or hot? Is your nose running or stuffed up? Did the cold come on after stress or loss of sleep? The complete picture of how you are manifesting the condition is looked at from a truly holistic perspective.

Homeopathy stimulates and balances the vital force by the use of a minute dose of any substance. In the case of homeopathy, less is better and more powerful. The chosen remedy is essentially a message sent through the central nervous system, which pervades all systems in the body. Remedies stimulate the self-healing process into action. This is a very simple explanation of homeopathy.

Unlike pharmaceuticals, homeopathy is one of the safest modalities of healing because its remedies are nature-based. Most homeopathic remedies are taken from plants while others are taken from minerals, elements of the periodic table, and animal sources. Remedies are free of any harmful or toxic side effects and are non-addictive. They are safe and gentle enough for infants and children. Homeopathic remedies do not have any damaging or dangerous side effects and are not tested on animals. Among 200 years of clinical experience and modern research, a meta-analysis published in *The Lancet* (Linde, Clausius, Ramirez, Melchart, Eitel, Hedges, & Jonas, 1997) showed homeopathy to be two times more effective than placebo when results of 89 studies were combined.

Homeopathy is practiced all over the world, including in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, India, Israel, Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, and Russia. Homeopathy has been the modality of choice for the Royal Family of Great Britain, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Sir Paul McCartney of The Beatles fame. American advocates of homeopathy have been Mark Twain, John D. Rockefeller, Sr., and Dr. Oz.

In this age, there are so many poisonous chemicals in our water, food, vaccines, and cleaning supplies. In order to do no harm to our children, our children's children, Mother Earth, and ourselves, we must be conscientious about using what is sustainable, healthy, and safe. Besides homeopathy, there are many more natural healing alternatives fitting the definition of "green medicine" that Druids can use, such as Ayurveda, traditional Chinese Medicine, herbalism, aromatherapy, hypnosis, and various forms of body and energy medicine.

While this column will focus mainly on homeopathy, the Healthy Ways section also invites submissions on other alternatives that provide natural resources to keep our bodies, minds, spirits, and planet in health, harmony, and balance.

All the best in your health,

Shelley Keneipp, M.H., DiHom (UK)

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Shelley Keneipp, MH, DiHom, holds diplomas from The British Institute of Homeopathy, U.K., the Dynamis School for Advanced Homeopathic Studies, U.K., and has furthered her advanced studies with the Guild of Homeopaths in England. She is the author of the book, The Practical Guide To Homeopathy For Children, Keeping Your Family Healthy Naturally and Safely.

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WELCOME TO INDIGENOUS WAYS

BY GAIL COLFAX

Druidry and the indigenous traditions in the Americas outwardly appear to have similar cultures and traditions. Many seek to understand the commonalities of both, intersecting and weaving similar ways of life. There are analogies of creeds, spirituality, experiential knowledge, wisdom, and insights to explore and from which to find inspiration. Many years ago, former OBOD Chosen Chief and Founder Ross Nichols encouraged Druids to learn the indigenous ways in their local area. This column serves to explore ancient and contemporary Druidry and its spiritual congruence with and distinctness from the Americas indigeneity. We welcome submission and dialogue.

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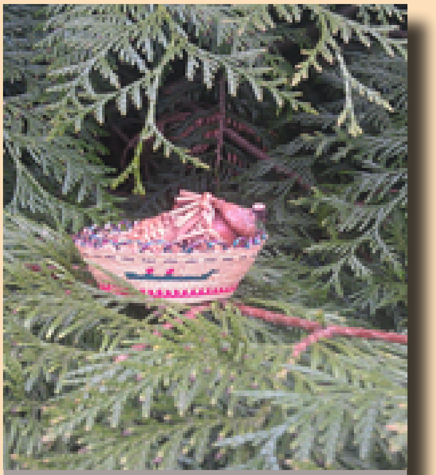

© Ted Colfax

Cedar basket with acorn by Helen, Wenatchee, WA; Canoe basket by Mary Moses, Pancheena, BC.

Gail Colfax has been a Bard in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 2011 and is a member of the Circle of Coll Seed Group. She is also a member of the British Druid Order. She works with the Indigenous Wellness Research Institute, and was taught by her elders her American Indian and indigenous ancestry and other indigenous earth spirituality. Gail and her husband Ted, five adult children and their spouses, and nine grandchildren live in Washington state.

REKINDLING THE SACRED FIRES: PART ONE

BY GREYWOLF

In the time of the Seventh Fire, New People will emerge. They will retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail…they will ask [the Elders] to guide them on their journey…. The New People will have to be careful in how they approach the Elders. If the New People will remain strong in their Quest,…there will be a Rebirth of the Anishinabe Nation and a rekindling of old flames. The Sacred Fire will again be lit. It is at this time that the Light Skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire, an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood. If the light skinned race makes the wrong choice of roads, the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back at them and cause much suffering and death to all the Earth's people. (Peterson, 2008).

The Anishinabe, also spelled Anishinaabe, are a confederation of woodland tribes that were spread across five states and three Canadian provinces around the year 1800 ("Anishinaabe," 2015). Reading these words elicits a surge of recognition for me. For years, I've spoken of rekindling the sacred fires of Druidry as a "living, breathing, animistic, shamanistic, life-affirming, Earth-honouring spirituality for the 21st century, drawing inspiration from the threefold stream of Awen's flow from its source, the Cauldron of the goddess Ceridwen" (British Druid Order, 2015, para. 1). While I live in the United Kingdom, this understanding of Druidry is accessible anywhere in the world, as my many Druid friends and colleagues in the Americas will testify.

One sacred fire is the hearth around which our ancestors gathered to tell stories, cook, eat, and keep winter's chill at bay. Another is the central fire, focus of our communal ceremonies for ages past. By "our," I mean the First Nations people of the Americas and those called "light skinned" people who are of European descent. For thousands of years, our ancestors walked the same road. I share the hope of the Anishinabe that, by rekindling the sacred fires of our ancestors, we will bring our peoples together again to light that "eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood" (Peterson, 2008, 9th para.).

However, I also share the concern that my ancestors may continue along the road of materialism and greed, which will bring further "suffering and death to all the Earth's people" (Peterson, 2008, 9th para.). This road has led to centuries of invasion and exploitation, and increasing environmental degradation. We have reached that fork in this road where right choices must be made.

Devastating weather events seem to be occuring on a more regular basis than ever in recorded history: oceans rise, threatening low-lying areas with inundation; droughts blight crops and kill animals; and forest fires, tsunamis, and hurricanes devastate whole communities. I could list examples of these events, but every reader who follows the news, or has lived through one of them, will be all too familiar with them. I'm not suggesting that any of these events are a punishment directed at those caught up in them by divine powers. While there are spirits who take a personal interest in us, there are others whose concerns are global. Natural catastrophes are not a moral judgement on the individuals whose lives are devastated by them, but a harsh warning to *all* humans.

© Greywolf

Pictish Eagle-stone from the Scottish spa town Strathpeffer (Gaelic: Srath Pheofhair) in Ross and Cromarty, Scotland

Twenty years ago, a First Nations guest at a U.K. Druid camp, John Two-Birds, said that Grandmother Earth and Grandfather Sky were "getting pissed" and would soon "start smudging cities," meaning they would send events like those outlined above as warnings that we as a species must change our course. I would say Mother Earth and Father Sky, the English expression is "getting pissed *off*," and the British term for "smudging" is "saining." Beyond such minor linguistic differences, Two-Birds expresses what I've felt since childhood. How much more devastation is needed before those who control business and politics get the message and actually do something? Since they are usually the ones causing the problems in the first place in the name of greed and self-interest, one wonders if they will ever change.

What then can *we* do? Two-Birds believed that we, the spirit workers of the world, must unite to bring about change. Again, this is something I've felt for much of my life. Those of us who anthropologists call "shamans" regularly work with changes in consciousness. When Druids and other spirit workers come together, aided by the spirits who guide and empower us, no one is better placed than we are to bring about the global shift in consciousness needed to bring our peoples back to the right road. The consequences if we don't are too devastating for us not to try, and growing numbers of spirit workers of many cultures are indeed coming together with exactly this in mind (see sidebar).

The realization that Druids were the shamanic folk of my own ancestors started me on the Druid path 40 years ago. As the earliest known spirituality of Britain, Ireland, and much of Europe, Druidry has much in common with native traditions elsewhere in the world. This ancestral kinship manifests strongly when working with spirits of nature.

Once at an English Druid camp, a spirit eagle grabbed me by the shoulders and took me to a distant mountain peak before bringing me back and releasing me. A year later at a camp during a drought, the earth was cracking and tempers were fraying. We held a ceremony in which I called the eagle spirit. He flew at me, and we switched bodies. As eagle, I rose into the sky, gathering the few tiny white clouds dotting the horizon. I was joined by three other eagles, and together we pulled in more clouds. The clouds darkened, filled with rain, and began to clash with thunder and lightning. The storm created, I bid my three kinsfolk farewell and flew back to the ceremonial circle, where my body was dancing in wild spirals, flapping my wolf-skin cloak. We switched spirits again. Suddenly back in my body, I lost balance, fell, rolled, and came back up again several times before coming to a halt.

The next day, a thunderstorm crossed the country in a narrow band with our camp at its center. Rolling thunder and flashing lightning brought such joy that people emerged from their tents and danced naked in the downpour as Mother Earth received the blessing of Father Sky.

Later, I learned of a native British tradition that four eagles who bring thunderstorms live among the clouds that ring the summit of Mount Snowdon in Wales, the direction from which my eagle relatives had come. In Welsh, Snowdonia is called *Eryri*, "Place of Eagles." Some say the eagles are shape-shifted Druids. An old Manx name for the eagle is *Drein*, "the Druid's bird" (Puplett, 2014). As the photo illustrates, I painted them on my drum.

© Elaine Gregory

Greywolf with the drum he painted in honor of the eagle and wolf animal spirits.

In the Americas, many First Nations tribes from the Pacific Northwest to the Great Lakes and across the Great Plains to the Southwest know of thunderbirds who bring storms. They also speak of shape-shifting between humans and thunderbirds (Mizrach, n.d.). The Quileute call the thunderbird *T'ist'ilal*, the Lakota, *Wakįnyąn*, the sacred winged one (Quileute Tribe, 2010).

Like their First Nations counterparts, native British traditions link eagles with the sun and tell of them as guardians of treasure and the tombs of heroes and as ancestors, invoked for healing and for warrior power and protection. An ode to Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, last native prince of Wales, composed about 1270, calls him "The eagle of Snowdon, and the bulwark of battle" (Evans, 2010, p. 39). Scottish clan chiefs wore eagle feathers in their bonnets. The bard-magician Taliesin and his Irish counterpart Amairgen both shape-shifted as eagles.

Eagle spirit transcends time and geography. Connecting with the eagles of Eryri connects me with the Bald Eagles of the Pacific Northwest when I am there. Eurasian Sea Eagles have much in common with American Bald Eagles while Golden Eagles are found all across Europe, Asia, and North America. Eagle populations separated by thousands of miles for thousands of years still share a common spirit. There is a lesson here for us humans.

In the second part of this article in a future issue of Druid Magazine, I will explore wolf ancestors and societies. I feel the spirits calling us to kindle the eighth fire of

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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These links offer prophecies that echo the Anishinabe and examples of different traditions coming together:

http://www.awarenessmag.com/julaug5/ja5_gathering_of_shamans.html

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http://www.sott.net/article/285608-Shamans-from-around-the-world-gather-in-Siberia-for-ceremony-timed-to-coincide-with-cosmic-cycles *peace, love, brotherhood, and sisterhood—that our peoples may once more walk the good road together.*

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Greywolf, also known as Philip Shallcrass, is Chief of the British Druid Order (BDO), a High Priest of Alexandrian Wicca, a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, and a member of the Quileute Drum Circle. A musician, writer, and artist, he makes frame drums and designs, builds, and thatches Iron Age roundhouses.

For the last nine years, Greywolf has been researching, writing, and editing distance learning courses for the BDO. Born on the English coast, he now lives in Wiltshire with two of his three sons halfway between the ancient stone circles of Avebury and Stonehenge. His "Greywolf's Lair" blog is available at http://greywolf.druidry.co.uk/

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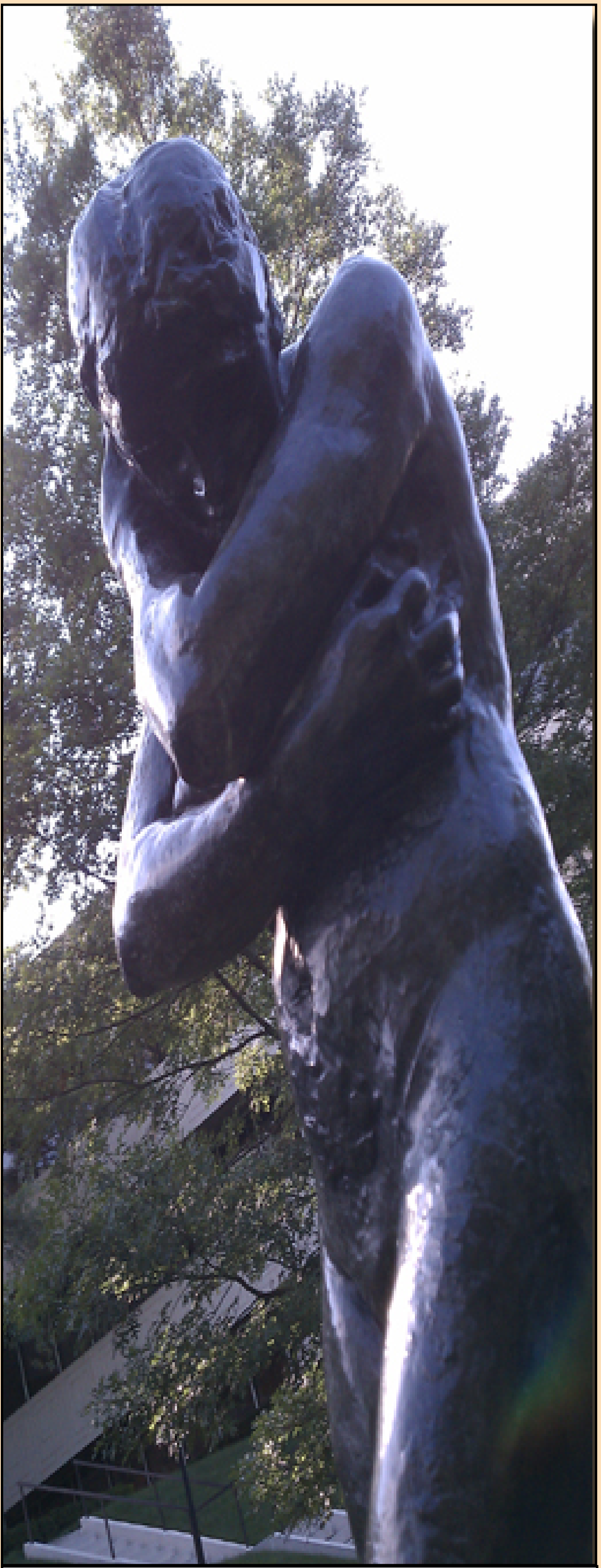

Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens, Purchase, NY

WELCOME TO VOICES OF AWEN

BY GAIL NYOKA

Voices of Awen welcomes varied expressions of the Bardic arts: discussions of craft, interviews of poets and writers, profiles of historical figures, meditations on Druidic poetry, fiction, and language, and, of course, poetry. Let Awen flow…

Storyteller, author, and award-winning playwright Gail Nyoka has been experiencing Awen with the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 2001. She divides her time between Ontario and Ohio, both places where she is a celebrant and officiant. In addition to being the department editor of Voices of Awen, she will explore the art of storytelling in all its forms in her column, The Storyteller's Circle.

WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

No! No! No! Storytelling is not reading to children from a book.

I had to explain this, yet again, quite recently when I mentioned to someone that I am a storyteller.

Storytelling is not reading! Storytelling is not only for children! Storytelling is a transformative art form that guides and shapes us through all the stages of our lives. We can hear a story in childhood then hear it again as a mature person and find new meaning in the story as we grow, age, and face death.

© Gail Nyoka

Stories flow like a river (Northern British Columbia)

In *A Celtic Book of Dying*, Phyllida Anam-Aire (2005) tells that not so long ago in Ireland, the Seábeans, or wise old women, told stories of death around the hearth-fire. "Before they told the stories, they invited death to sit by the fire…and listen to the tales being told about her" (p. 36). She continues:

"The old ones believed that the storytellers were alchemists who had within them the ability to take raw, inspirational words and change them into living embers which burn and grow within the psyche of the listener, who in turn adds to the story in the retelling of it. Thus the story becomes a living entity, not just dead words." (Anam-Aire, 2005, p. 39)

The oral form is ever-changing and adapting. Like the flow of a mighty river, it cannot be frozen in one place, as are words on a page. The spoken word goes back as far as people. It can capture a fleeting sensation, the story absorbed by the child in the womb, the sounds transmitted from the landscape, the sigh of a last breath.

That breath is words, which reach the ear and convey meanings that are different to each listener. The story is 'about' what the listener has within the heart.

Stories need to be told all through life, and especially at times of change and transition. They show us how others have taken a path similar to our own while also giving meaning to our lives and helping us to make our unique life journey.

Writers are storytellers, it is true, as are filmmakers and playwrights. Yet the oldest form from which these others sprang is the purely oral form: the tribe sitting around the evening fire, hearing the tales that gave them insight into the land, the sky, the animals, the trees, the ancestors, and the journey of life and death.

So, while reading out loud can bring an enjoyable and/or educational experience for a listener, it cannot recreate the intimacy of an oral telling. While giving children a story is a gift of great value, that same story or another told to a grown person brings with it a greater reflectiveness and depth. Stories should never be abandoned in adulthood – they are even more valuable as we age. Stories can help us to adapt to and accept life's passages, and live to the fullest.

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SELF-WILLED BLODEUWEDD OF SPRING

BY RAYMOND TALIESIN

The Oak, Broom, and Meadow-
sweet
Whispered
In a voice like an aroma
Carried on the wind
Then the Djinn heard their call
Felt them
Crying out for life
Yearning for
A greater existence
And the Spirit remembered
Remembered
Recalled that yearning
Like a song sung ancient ages ago
Carried like an aroma
Carried on the wind
The song sung to a purpose
A purpose
For taking form
So the Spirit listened
And with will
She took a form
A body of Flora
In Spring
In spring's life giving breeze
The breath of a zephyr
Became her first words

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The Warmth of the Sun
Fed her
Feeding her the energy
to bring to stem bones
Stems soon to become saplings
So green
The green oaken wood
White blooms of meadowsweet
To serve as her skin
Yellow brooms and bushels
Cascading, for hair
And knowledge of existence
Becoming eyes
When mixed with the magic
Of May morning dew
In this dance of life
With its myriad partners
She Became
She Existed
Self-willed Blodeuwedd of spring

Raymond Taliesin is a member of the British Druid Order, acting Priest for the Caer Cormorant Gorsedd in Olympia, WA, and one of the Bards of Turtle Island.

THE CORE OF DRUIDRY

BY SUSA MORGAN BLACK

For me, as a Bard, to discover the "core,"
Awen leads through the Bardic forest of lore.
The animals share with me their point of view,
and I Look at the world with eyes that are new.
I learn the old tales, and tell a few of my own
I study with Taliesin, and wear a blue gown.

As an Ovate I study the Way of the Trees
For Seeing and Healing, they give me the keys.
I pass through the veil to worlds beyond this,
and travel through time in a forest of mist.
I meet with the ancestors in the place where we dream.
I visit the Wild Hunter, and wear a gown green.

As a Druid, at last I have passed through the veils,
and am beginning to learn what the mystery reveals.
I climb the high Tor to study planet and star, and
through Druid's Sight, I can now see afar.
I can run on four paws, or take a bird's flight,
I meet now with Merlyn and wear a gown white.

Susa Morgan Black is a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, reaching Druid level in 2002. She is a member of Doire Brighid, a San Francisco Bay Area OBOD Druid Seed Group.

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WHEN ALL IS DARK

BY LISABETH RYDER

now when all is dark
cooing night birds sing
gray coyotes bark
quiet daydreams bring
questions to linger
as hope fades away
tears to remember
and years gone astray

howling desert wind
blows till I'm hallow
nothing to defend
attending sorrow
I saw you again
your hair disheveled
far up the mountain
as light disappeared

my name was whispered
the wind in your voice
my will confounded
you gave me a choice
have me and wonder
leave always longing
enduring hunger
never belonging

Lisabeth Ryder, PhD, lives in Los Angeles and has a degree in the field of linguistic anthropology. Her first love is poetry, and she has found a spiritual home in Druidry, a nature spirituality, where her divergent paths come together. She uses a five-syllable structure because she read somewhere that it was used in ancient Celtic poetry.

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The Space Between

by Lisabeth Ryder

In the space between
notes lies the music
amid the unseen,
the metaphysic

naked non-being
become receptive
ever awaiting
in the creative

nurture awareness
peaceful potential
elegant stillness
simply eternal

unanswered questions
where truths abide
in the reflections
mysteries reside

daunting nothingness
demeanor turning
toward the abyss
and mystic yearning

live in the moment
no longer temporal
when fully present
in the essential

existence fluid
far hinterland tread
to find the druid
Silence is Sacred.

Incantation

by Lisabeth Ryder

An incantation
uttered in the dark
reveals intention
and emotion stark
Five sacred relics
arrayed left to right
call the heretics
and the candles light
Smokey incense burn
Setting flames to dance
Let the ether churn
And enter a trance

Calling on power
from deep within me
your name I whisper
and your face I see
Tears fill the cauldron
till the edge surges
Through dark environ
a spirit urges
Bittersweet mem'ry
Wind pierces me through
Savage destiny!
Death has taken you

Song of Ostara

© Anne Hammond-Tooke

by Cerrigan

The rain drops patter on the ground
The birds, they run for cover.
Winter's grasp has come unbound
Like some disheartened lover.

"Tis Spring!, Tis Spring!"
The birds all sing, within their leafy bowers.
While Mother Earth softly stirs
Beneath the falling showers.

Tis' time for seeds to raise their heads
As they toil 'neath the dirt.
While the brightness of the morning sun
Sheds light upon the earth.

Ostara's song fills the air
As winter's hold takes flight.
The signs of Spring are everywhere
As Darkness turns to Light.

Cerrigan is a word smith and a musician from Kirkland, WA, who hopes her prose touches others.

WELCOME TO THE WRITING CONTEST

BY ROBERT PACITTI

Druid Magazine is excited to host a writing prompt contest to offer experienced expositionists and burgeoning bards alike an opportunity to flex their creative muscles. Submissions will be evaluated on creativity, application of theme, and authors' ability to draw the reader into their imagination. Judges include three staff editors and two special guests. In addition to being showcased here, the winner will be invited to be a special guest judge for the next issue.

Summer 2015 Winner:

Know Thyself by Nimue Brown

Runnerups:

Golden Feather by Wanda C.

Spirit Kin by Dean Easton

The Queen of the Desert Woodland by Shawnee Luke

This issue's theme:

"You are a spirit animal on a journey to find your human. When you do, it is not at all what you expected..."

SPECIAL GUEST JUDGES

Sarah Fuhro is a member of the Mystic River Grove in Massachusetts, and a Druid in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. A natural storyteller and poet, Sarah has written an essay on Being An American Druid in this issue.

Sarah Fuhro

Roger Arnold

Roger Arnold is semi-retired, teaches Algebra at a junior college, and is a master gardener. He has attended the East Coast Gathering the last two years and is a Druid Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids.

Writing Contest Winner

Know Thyself

by Nimue Brown

Your heart calls out for me to exist. And so, I become. No longer simply Spirit, I step out into being a spirit. I step. I am that which walks, and this is my first knowledge of myself. At once I see that I do not walk alone, for all around me, Spirit gives birth to spirits. I feel that we have all been yearned into being, longed for, needed into all manner of forms for all kinds of reasons. We are what is required. I cannot say why the wings, scales, and barks around me came to be as they are. They have their own reasons and their own journeys to make.

I am not them, this is clear. I see them, feel the process of separation and I do not know myself. I do not know you, but I feel the connection, threads of possibility, and a sense of purpose. My first task is to find you. I feel it in my bones. I feel that I have bones. It is not fate—I have choice and free will and I go into the world to seek for you because the cry of your heart sings out to me so keenly. I feel the ache of your song, and know that I could be the answer to that dull gnaw of hunger. If I choose to be, and if you let me. There are no certainties, for all that you have sung me into being.

In moving, I learn more of my own nature. I discover that I have four good feet to place lovingly upon the earth. My nose is keen. I may cross water if I am careful, but I do not belong to it, and water says she may not be kind to ones such as I. My feeling is that water is not always kind and it is nothing personal.

I learn that I do not belong to the air. I can only travel beneath it. While I sense the ways of fire, it is my nature to recoil from them, and so already I know this much of myself.

Darkness comes, and in this I begin to understand the meaning of the light that preceded it. Darkness is a friend to me, creating a different kind of world, more welcoming. I am night scuttler and secret rustler. I stand upon the earth and gaze up in love at the moon. I run and roll with my own kind, moving through their soft and guarded bodies, learning their solitary ways. There are tales belonging to these land-people who are my people. I am more than spirit now. I am spirit woven into story and experience, and the wisdom of living flesh. I am field protector, powerful in my magic to be guardian of the crops. I travel in company with the fairy folk, accepting human offerings of milk and bread.

I find you on the edge of dreaming, at the limits of your own mind. Drawn at last to these edges by your need for me, I rejoice in my heart, for I am here to comfort and uplift you. How often have you set out to look for me, and failed? How many miles and years have I traversed in seeking you?

You are so very big. Compared to you, my form is very small. If I had thought about it, I would have expected the reverse, for I have learned my breadth and depth as I travelled. Your heart calls to me like a tiny, fragile newborn thing. Too small by far for the time and bulk you wear.

When you finally notice and recognise me, I see disappointment in your eyes. I am not dismayed by this. In seeing you, I understand what you do not. You came here hoping to find sister bear or brother wolf, or some other mighty power to give you feelings of safety and protection. You wanted to be worthy of their glamour, of the pride and kudos you imagine their guardianship would bring. I know you, but you do not yet know me.

"I'm what you get."

These are my first spoken words and I admit I had hoped to manage more poetry and to convey a hint of the numinous, but you aren't ready for that. You need plain speech.

I approach, and touch my small, soft nose to your hand. I realise that I am going to have to eat you. To take something so large and awkward into something so small will help you understand what size really is. It will help you to be bigger on the inside. Not today, though. For now, you have enough to think about: I am your hedgehog, prickly eater of snails. Right now you are worrying about what you will say when you surface back in the workshop. Afterwards, when you stop thinking and start feeling, you will know that I could not possibly have been anything else.

Nimue Brown is a British Druid, blogger, folk singer, and author of assorted Pagan and Druid titles, Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids-trained, somewhat feral and a bit chaotic. She did once meet a hedgehog who was gazing at the moon.

GOLDEN FEATHER

BY WANDA C.

In the cold chill of an early morn, gray downy tipped golden feathers spread wide, arcing towards the dawning sun under the bright blue sky. A northerly wind whispered through the evergreen trees as I soared higher and higher as snow white tail feathers lifted and dark eyes pierced the misty veil that clung to the silver sparkling stream meandering through the valley. A sharp cry rent the air as I searched and hunted further on, descending in a spiral as a shadow wandered through my domain.

Not often would a stranger venture this far into the forest, not often would a visitor linger here. There had been a rustling through the decaying leaves, a crackling as lone footsteps crushed the curling death, enriching the land while she began to prepare for her rest through winter's cold embrace.

Upon that rare occurrence when a seeking soul wandered near, it would normally be the innocence of a child, lost in the night and needing a gentle guidance to soothe their hurried soul. It would be a moment in time that brought the lone young one here for a quiet moment as they slept, and then, with the first rays of light, they would awaken and be off on a new adventure in their own world, soon forgetting their dream of solitude and peace.

Yet, this was no child, it was a woman, fully grown, and she was blinded to the light, deaf to the sounds, adrift in the early morning shadows as night departed in deference to the day.

The painful hues of ebony lingered upon the woman's charred heart as if burned upon its edges in forgetfulness and unrequited love, so forged it was upon her soul. Too loud had her world grown, too harsh and demanding of a fragile spirit as she had crumbled to the forest floor, cast down as the falling leaves in the autumn wind's grasp and weeping as hot teardrops melted into the mossy cold earth. Taken and cast aside again and again, betrayed and searching for that which was never lost but could not be seen.

Upon my long and arduous journey to find the one that I would guide, I had not expected to find a human so pained and so lost. I circled and allowed my shadow to fall just on the edges of her deep dreams and flutter just beyond the corners of her sight, but alas, she could not see.

No matter what I might send to enlighten her path, one image after another into her world, still the woman would not believe, would not dare to dream again or truly see. No falcon, no owlet, no big inquiring eyes or soft cooing of a dove mirroring my call in the dawn or late in the dusk would awaken her to me. No laughing gull that nodded his head on a high clifftop to bring her attention to the frolicking selkie in the sea below, no mocking jackdaw from rampart ruins would make her open her eyes. She would not listen to my whispers, she would not awaken from her sleep. And so she remained stumbling in the dark, alone.

Until, one day after watching and observing, the woman finally found the meandering path that had been calling to her. Beyond the torment and melancholy, beyond the pain, she began to take those steps to enlighten her soul. And there, deep in the quiet of her tall oak and willow grove, I waited.

She sat upon the gray level rock and listened to the gray bearded gentle man who guided her through song and stone. Returning often, I was there, upon yon oaken branch, yet she barely noticed me despite being pure white against the wet dark bark or thick green leaves. So I waited yet longer, til falling burnt orange and golden leaves withered and dropped leaving the limbs stark and bare. Surely, she

FALL WRITING CONTEST THEME

"YOU AWAKEN IN A CIRCULAR ROOM WITH FOUR DOORS: THE FIRST IS MADE OF WOOD, THE SECOND OF STONE, THE THIRD OF ICE, AND THE FOURTH OF FLAME. CHOOSE A DOOR TO PASS THROUGH, AND TELL US THE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DO."

would see me now? Yet there in the falling glistening snow, I became obscured within the shroud of white, and she could not see me. Even as the old wizened woman who came and took the soul that I would know further and deeper into the forest, into the darker shadows of the night, she was still lost to me.

I followed but a short distance away and, then, finally, under the climbing moon and sparkling star, the woman stood upon the highest precipice, bathed in the golden light as the Lady drew her off upon wing'd flight! Now, now was my chance! I lifted up, releasing talons from the high acorned branch, and higher and higher I flew until I was there, just there, soaring with her, flying as one as feather melted to flesh and nose tipped to curling beak, talons drawing up as feet fell away, her slender arms arching into my spanning wings of snow white and golden hues alighting under the silvery stars and milky moonlight. Yes! We were one! Soaring, gliding, flying over hill and dale, valley and mountain, as one with the wind we were, as one with the land, sea and sky. I felt her heart beating as one with my own, the pain swept away, the burnt edges fallen to ash, forgotten in the breeze as new growth pushed through, healing her heart, healing her soul. A piercing cry of joy rending the air as onward we flew! The tears were but memories of the past, as many adventures await us now. Yes, this was what I had been waiting for, this is what she had been born for. A child of the heart, a woman of the soul now glissading upon the winds with I, her animal spirit, the golden white Tylo alba.

Wanda C., also known as Wanda Ghostpeeker, is a Druid with the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. She is an avid traveler, Halloween/Samhuinn enthusiast, and writer.

SPIRIT KIN

BY DEAN EASTON

The first time I ran in his dream, it passed over me like mist on skin. By choice I run alone, unless it chances another of my kin runs near, so to find I shared a dream surprised me. It began all earth-smell and moss and wet bark, a good dream. My hooves thrummed on the forest floor as I ran, a beat that climbed into my bones. The dream swam and folded and passed around me. I caught the sweet-foul reek of a wolf-kill, the deer carcass flyblown and rotting by a fallen oak. And, much fainter beyond that, the scent of truffles.

© Brom Hanks

I stopped and raised my head to sniff again. No danger. I stomped a forefoot once. Somewhere overhead an owl called. The wolf-pack that had lingered here after feeding was gone, a day or more away. I turned to leave this dream for another, one more among the many I walk. We all walk them, boar-kind like me, and beast, bird, and fish. Humans too, who remember now less well all we do together.

Then this human dreamer—he must have moved in his sleep, or spoken, because everything shifted. I was with him still, which also surprised me, because nothing bound us to each other. Now I stood in a grassy clearing I knew somehow, though just as keenly I knew I had never set foot there before. Dew wet my legs. The sun broke through, warm on my back, then hid again. I snorted. In the distance, juniper and pine hills that lifted through the clouds dissolved just as quickly, swirling by while I stood, waiting. There he was, a warm shadow, still in the dream, searching now, and troubled, restless. Once he cried out without words.

No, he had not called me. I still ran free, but a longing to run with this one clung to me like smoke. Strange again. I could feel it along my spine, touch of a human hand, his hand. Soft as spider web at first, then stronger, as he reached out. He ran with me, still unknowing, and—I felt it now—still a child. Stranger yet. Others are called to guard human young. It is their appointed task, to journey with those who may not live to see many winters. Always before this I answered a call, or was sent. Perhaps the human dreamtime was shifting.

This one rolled onto his side, and it was then I heard his heartbeat. Felt it in my chest, paired with mine, though faster. A simple thing, but it dizzied me with joy, as if he were one of my own kind. Perhaps I *was* sent after all, and did not know it.

I turned to look more closely, to see and know him again by sight as well as scent, to firm the memory of him. Surer now, I loosed my hold on choosing only for myself, and waited. The dream swirled around us both, breaking up and then forming again, and as I stood there I recalled many things done and seen and heard of, fights and deaths and births, death-cold winters and drowsing summers, oak-mast and firelight and storm, each scoring their track.

All at once, the dream sight sharpened and I could see him. Little milk teeth closed around the thumb in his mouth. His easy breathing ruffled my fur. A human child, small and warm and safe in a human house. No shaman by a fire circle singing a summons, no world-drum painted in old signs and throbbing with an irresistible charm, no dried herbs smoldering, no human of a dozen winters or more on vision quest. And no tug in the sinews demanding I link with this one.

But I stood over him, breathing him anyway, testing this unlikely bond between us, learning what I could. Yes, the Cross marked him, along with other, older marks that followed him lightly enough. Things his blood carried, things he might later claim or refuse. Young as he was, he still dreamt free of any mark. Good warding the Others had granted him. Clean choice lay before him. Then all at once, in the way of gifts, his dream eyes found me. He gazed for a long moment, and I felt that look sweep over me, a wave of wildfire heat. He did not turn away from what he saw. No fear or, worse, indifference. Instead, he opened to me and we danced together the first time.

In later dreams, sometimes he still forgot and found me again, another kind of dance. Once in a human sacred place, a Shinto temple, he knew me again in a little wooden *haro* image other humans carved, something to touch and remember with, when one dream fails and need shapes another. Something to exchange for a handful of metal, a human kind of trade. And later still, in waking vision, this time with him knowing and seeking me. We have danced together since then, and he draws on my strength, his hand rarely leaving my back. Now he remembers, this one who found and lost and found me as a child, who has named and claimed me, and I know the human dream of us still lives.

Dean Easton is a writer and teacher who lives with his wife Sarah in Southern Vermont. Like Robert Frost after he settled in New England, he's determined to "get Yankier and Yankier."

THE QUEEN OF THE DESERT WOODLAND

BY SHAWNEE LUKE

The man sat with his elbows propped up on the table and his head in his hands. Beside him, his wife of 20 years hung on every word her sister went on about her vacation in England. And with every word, he felt his heart sinking even more. For most of their marriage, his wife had talked about little else than going there herself. Her biggest dream was that they'd one day make it to Stonehenge to celebrate the Summer Solstice with the Druids there.

Now his fist closed around the Awen charm at his neck. Twenty years of mortgages and bills. Of ponying up the money for little league and dance lessons. Of flat tires, broken glasses, and other unexpected little mishaps. Every time they thought there was a light at the end of the tunnel, something else would come up. And now, as he watched her with stars in her eyes as the conversation droned on, he wondered how he was going to tell her.

"Well, it's getting late," he muttered before standing up to excuse himself to bed.

"Geârr," a voice whispered. As a morning breeze wound through the Mojave Desert, it bore that one word; whispered by a God in a far-away land. And with that whisper came a strange awareness. Here, I was called other names. But now, I understood that Geârr was also me and that I had something of great importance to do…

A peek out from my creosote bush told me that there were no predators on the ground. Atop one of the Joshua trees sat a red-tail hawk. I knew him. Over the years, he'd taken some of my children. One day, he'd catch me as well. But I would not be an easy meal. I was a queen here among the smaller cottontail rabbits. I was a survivor in this harsh land and I would not be taken without a chase and a fight.

Spring had come, and the desert was alive after a recent rain. It was time for us all to find food—though only enough to keep us alive and running. For the survivors knew that to gorge was to die. For those of us who could avoid the coyote or the hawk, it was also time to mate. I would do both, after this task from the foreign voice was fulfilled.

In my mind's eye, I could see him there. The man was sitting on a bench behind his home, fighting his despair. He clutched to his heart the emblem of those foreign Gods while hoping for some guidance. His pleas were heard. The voice wanted him to know the thing that I understood better than anyone else. I would have to go to him. Tell him. Perhaps hawk did not chase me because the foreign God had spoken to him, too.

With another glance at hawk, I wandered along the desert floor. A family of quail peaked out from a nearby juniper before racing in unison to another nearby. Little chickadees danced through the branches of another juniper, eating its berries while filling the morning air with the sounds of their chirps. They paid me little mind as I kept running, leaving the comfort of my creosote and the sanctuary of the desert for my task.

The black rock of the manmade path was still cool when I approached. It was a path I always avoided, having seen more than one unfortunate creature crushed to death by the metal monsters that raced along it. Those manmade monsters were not hunters. They neither searched for their kill nor took it with them. But they slaughtered the desert's denizens with a cruel detachment. And they were faster than rabbit, hare, or quail could ever run. This new awareness told me that, unlike hawk, they would not listen to the voice of any God.

I sat for a moment and turned my large ears. For the moment, I could neither see nor hear any of the metal monsters. But I also knew that there would be very little warning when one did appear. Cautiously, I made my way onto the black rock, stopping when I reached the yellow marks at its center. It was then that I heard it: a monster. Its roar was quickly becoming louder. My heart raced in my chest as I sat paralyzed. The monster ran past—creating a wind that blew my ears back. It left behind it a stench that only man's things could create.

After a quick search, I squeezed my way through a small hole in a metal fence. The garden beyond was nothing short of a feast filled with blossoms and low-hanging fruits. But the end of my journey sat in front of me—with his tired eyes fixed on the ground in front of him. He was sad, I knew. But there were no tears for this survivor. Somehow he'd forgotten what an amazing thing a survival was. Not every creature was as fortunate as he and I.

Then he looked up and our eyes met…

Stress and a sleepless night had left the man in a dark place. Then his eyes came back into focus and he saw the jackrabbit staring at him from only a few feet away. It stood on its hind legs, ears perked and completely unafraid. As he stared back into its eyes, he understood.

"Honey?" His wife called out behind him as she walked out of the house. "Everything all right?"

It was time to tell her, he knew. "They cut my hours at work." Once he began, the words came easy. "I don't know if we can ever afford England."

Rather than the heartbreak he expected, she let out a sigh and sat beside him, winding her arm through his as she spoke. "We'll be fine. We always have been. We don't need England."

Together, they watched with contentment as the jackrabbit helped itself to a fallen apricot.

Shawnee Luke lives in the Antelope Valley of Southern California with her husband, son, and two stepchildren. She and her husband are Bards in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids.

© Brom Hanks

Welcome to Reviews

by Nicole Franklin

Nicole Franklin is the lead organizer of the seed group of the Oak and Eagle in the Washington, D.C. area. She is an active member of the local and regional pagan community and an Ovate Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids.

What Plants Talk About: Educational, Relevant, and Fun!

by Robert Pacitti

What Plants Talk About, produced by PBS Nature (2013), takes viewers on an intriguing and visually stunning journey to an unapparent world of communication that exists wherever roots may settle.

In modern media, there is no lack of material when it comes to documentaries on the natural world. The advent of on-demand video services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Video have provided countless visionaries with the ability to present their personal passions to a wide-reaching audience. PBS Nature has always been a leading producer on this front, and with What Plants Talk About I believe they have created a gem that will speak to the soul of every Druid.

Experimental Plant Ecologist and University of Alberta Professor J.C. Cahill does an outstanding job of navigating the viewer through a general overview of his theories on plant communication. The concepts of root competition, chemical signaling, and plant behavior are presented in an animal context using both hard science and light-hearted parable. This juxtaposition creates an exciting and joyful viewing experience that is perfectly in line with something that we as Druids already knew: the realm of plants has many mysteries yet to be revealed!

© WNET

One of the most powerful vignettes presented in the film covers the role of "Mother Trees" who sustain and nourish their young in the deep forests of British Columbia. Scientist Suzanne Simard offers viewers information on the research conducted on the large swaths of Douglas fir that cover the region and the vast underground networks created through their root systems. The more visceral concepts of evolutionary theory are thrown out the window as Simard uses radioactivity to show that, older more established trees are gifting their resources to younger saplings through fungi. The over-arching theme of this film becomes that of community and symbiosis not only from mother to child, but also from species to species.

At just under an hour, I found this documentary to be a wonderful distraction from the mundane trappings of day-to-day life. While not dealing directly with pagan themes, it certainly touches upon thought-processes that we experience on our Druidic journey and attempts to give us a more scientific view of a realm that we hold so dear.

References

Culbert, B., Fulton, K. (Producers) & Buffie, E. (Director). (2014). What plants talk about [Motion picture]. United States of America: PBS Nature.

Robert Pacitti is a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids from the Philadelphia area. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, gardening, and studying off-grid living solutions.

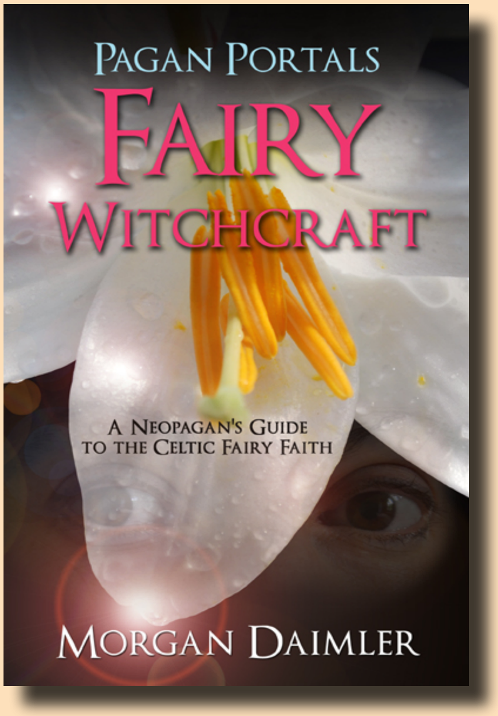
Watch The documentary

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/what-plants-talk-about-video-full-episode/8243/

PAGAN PORTALS - FAIRY WITCHCRAFT: A NEO-PAGAN'S GUIDE TO THE CELTIC FAIRY FAITH

BY NIMUE BROWN

While the title may suggest this isn't a book for Druids, Pagan Portals - Fairy Witchcraft: A Neopagan's Guide to the Celtic Fairy Faith (2014) is a book that has much to offer the Druid reader. Author Morgan Daimler is a Celtic Reconstructionist who has previously written about her path (2013) and the Morrigan. She draws heavily on Celtic sources to consider the possibilities of exploring magic with faeries. While folklore sources for faeries are often much more recent, ancient mythic stories associating early inhabitants of Ireland with faeries makes it both tempting and reasonable to infer relevance to Druidry.



© Moon Books

We don't always talk much about magic in modern Druidry. That may be a mistake. Certainly, Druid magic is not the will-and-command-driven magic of occult and witchcraft traditions, and there are atheist Druids for whom the only relevant forms of magic are wonder and transformation. Other forms of magic might be available to others. Polytheist, animist, and even the more agnostic, philosophical Druid might well benefit from thinking about enchantment and re-enchantment. The grey, hard-edged, well-lit modern world is a long way from the shadowy twilights and ambiguities of our ancestors' realities. Before many of us even think about working with faeries, we may need to think about our willingness to be enchanted.

This is a very small book with a great deal going on in it. Daimler draws on folklore and tradition as well as personal experience to talk succinctly and helpfully about working with faeries. This is not "fairy" in the cute and inoffensive sense, either. The fairies of Celtic myth are a complex, challenging, and sometimes downright dangerous bunch, something Daimler handles with both respect and responsibility. "Celtic myth" in this sense tends to mean the medieval and more recent rather than the ancient, but the way Irish mythology connects faeries with the ancient sites of Ireland makes it tempting to see a much more direct connection between ideas of faerie and the business of Druids. If the raths, which are the hollow hills of the fey, are barrows that pre-date Celtic Druids, might we be tapping into a very old understanding of land spirits?

Having had a fascination with faeries for most of my life, I recognize much of the material being drawn from in this insightful book. It's a substantial text in terms of scouring and bringing together relevant material. Fairy Witchcraft is a book that will radically accelerate one's learning because it offers key points and stories and opens the door to the discovery of further material. It's a very solid book in this regard, and a great jumping-off point for someone who is interested in the subject but does not know where to start. For those already deeply involved in faerie lore and otherworldly work, the personal stories Daimler shares are fascinating and may make this book also worth their while.

The "witchcraft" of this book is not a matter of imposing your will on faerie or making anyone do your bidding. I think this is really important because it shows us how magical approaches within Druidry might work on entirely different, more relational terms than witchcraft usually suggests. Daimler writes about a collaborative process based on developing relationships. There is exchanging and requesting, but no demanding. Will is important only insofar as you need to be fully aware, and in control of yourself. The practitioner is perhaps more likely to find things asked of them rather than offered to them. This is an approach to magic I think many Druids will find resonant. Magic that gives us power over other beings feels inherently at odds with Druidic ideas of honourable relationship, and is something I find impossible to square with my animist outlook.

Magic based on reciprocity, negotiation, and mutual support is far more appealing to me and, I suspect, other Druids. This book opened the way for me to think far more widely about the possibilities of magic within a Druidic approach. If you feel that everything has spirit and at least the potential for opinions and free will, then using anything for magical purposes becomes complicated to say the least. The book suggests a slower pace of working in which intentions must be matched and relationships built.

The first advice anyone experienced with faeries will tend to give to someone considering working with faeries is: don't. Faeries have the potential to be dangerous in every story featuring them that I have ever read. They do not think as we do, their values and intentions differ from ours, and they have a reputation for taking offense and acting on it! Not that any of this stops people from trying. Some people feel drawn to them, and others find faerie comes to them whether they want it or not. Daimler is very clear about the reasons not to play with these powerful, unpredictable nature spirits. But if you have already heard the tinkling of bells and have caught a glimpse of something otherworldly, then this book will give you a fighting chance of becoming more poet than lunatic.

It's a charmingly written book—clear, concise, informative and not too prescriptive. The author makes clear what is sourced from tradition and literature versus what comes from personal experience or belief. If the subject matter appeals to you, I very much recommend it.

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Daimler, M. (2014). Pagan portals - fairy witchcraft: A neopagan's guide to the Celtic fairy faith. Hants, U.K.: Moon Books.

© Grizelda Holderness

Nimue Brown

Nimue Brown is a mentor for the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, author of a number of Moon Books titles, and regular blogger at www.druidlife.wordpress.com. She has an iron allergy and was born with pointy ears.

© Brom Hanks

Welcome to Children of the Forest

by Ruth Ann Oskolkoff

Children of the Forest is a safe and creative spot for children and youth to share their growing Druid practice and life. We encourage artistic creativity in the upcoming generation in all forms, including poems, stories, articles, art, graphics, and music.

Department editor Ruth Oskolkoff is a wife and mother, longtime member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, and lifelong beginner. She hails from Seattle, which has coffee shops on every corner, rainy foggy mornings, and a very polite population.

Being Raised Pagan: I Feel the Trees' Energy

by Cayla, age 11

My name is Cayla, I am 11 years old, and most of my life I have been taking part in rituals and pagan gatherings. My parents have started teaching me about pagan doings. They have raised me to know that I can choose any God and Goddess to think of at their special rituals. I chose to read Kristoffer Hughes' book "The Journey Into Spirit" to understand how you go through a loved one's death and to find out about other people's death experiences. I also recently learned how to have all of the elements in me—to keep me balanced.

When I participate in rituals, I do not stand there because I am forced to, but because I want to actually participate. I feel the energy of all the participants going to wherever it must go. When I go into the woods, I feel the trees' energy moving. When a tree has been carved or hurt in some way, I lend the tree some energy to help it get better. When my family goes to any woods, we look for trees that might have gotten hurt, or got hurt and then grew some.

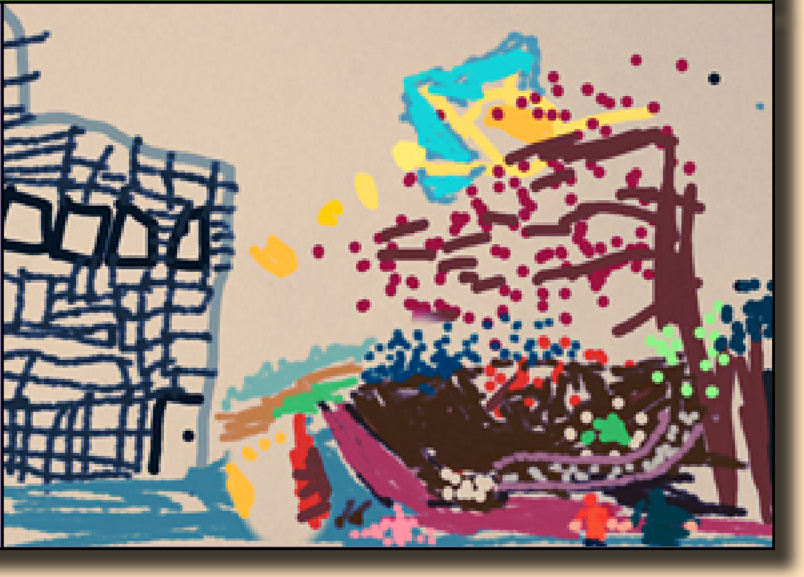
It is tough sometimes though, being pagan. There are not many kids who I can talk to about our ways. I have a hard time explaining to my friends about my religion. I felt my grandmother did not help either. When I was little she kept taking my sister and I to her church and made us pray to "God" for our families. I did not have a good feeling after that. I also remember a couple years later, she still took my sister and I to her church every time we stayed over for the weekend. I stood up to her. I told her to stop because we did not like it.

Even though there are troubles, I enjoy being pagan. I feel the trees' energy moving.

The Apartment Garden

by Johann, age 11

White fire rain coming from the roof
Pink petals piled on the ground,
A big puddle on the walkway.
The path leads to another garden—
A fairy mount with rocks around.
I feel peaceful with the green plants,
Everything is quiet in the rain.



WELCOME TO AROUND THE AMERICAS

BY JASON STIEBER

The Around the Americas section will feature articles highlighting the interesting ways OBOD members have adapted Druidry to the diverse ecologies and cultures of the Americas' many regions. We will also offer a regular listing of local seasonal and special events of interest to the Druid community.

Jason Stieber is a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids in the Bardic grade, living in Washington, D.C. and celebrates the seasons with the Oak and Eagle seed group. He is an archivist and oral historian for the Smithsonian Institution, focusing his research and collecting efforts on primary resources in American art history.

DRUID GROUPS OF NORTH AMERICA

A TOOL TO FIND DRUID GROUPS THAT MEET NEAR YOU

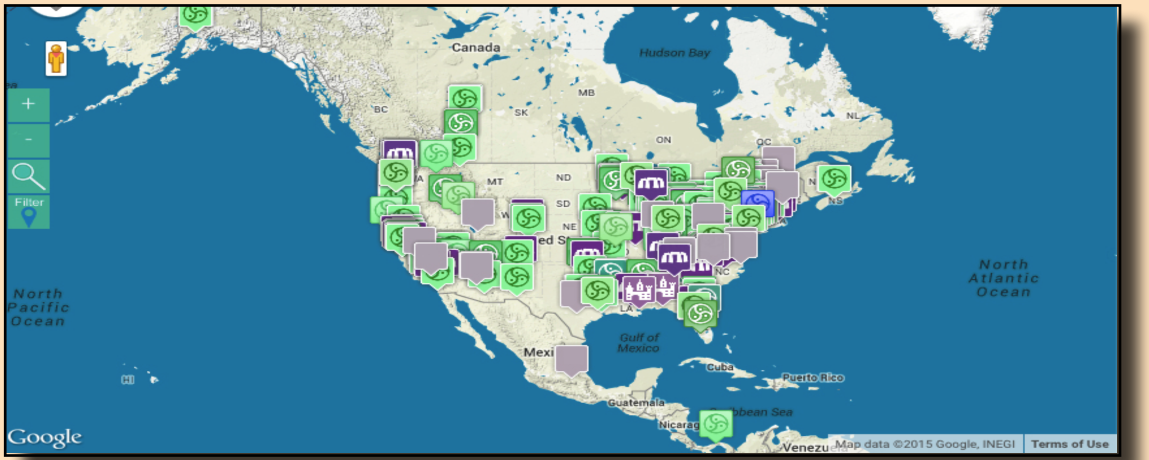
BY DANA WIYNINGER

It can be a challenge to find Druid groups that gather to meet face-to-face in North America, given the large distances and open spaces that are involved. After my husband and I started traveling full-time in the United States, I spent a lot of time searching online for nearby Druid groups. In the spring of 2014, my guides moved me to share what I had found by publishing an online Druid Groups Map.

This interactive map shows independent and affiliated Druid groups that have a public web presence and that meet in-person. You can search for groups by Druid order or area, and there is a list of groups with their contact information. The Druid Groups Map of North America has grown to over 220 physical groups from Canada south to Panama and is available at: https://www.danaan.net/druidry/druid-groups-map/.

Other resources, including instructions for finding other Druids in your area, are also available via the map page. For more information, to submit corrections, or to add a Druid group, please contact me at danaan1st@yahoo.com.

Dana Wiyninger believes in the beauty of our lands, and honors the many ways that Druids practice here. She and her husband have simplified their lives and started traveling throughout North America in 2013. Dana is a Druid member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, a member of the Reformed Druids of Gaia (and past member of other orders). She writes about nature and spiritual practice at her website Danaan - Sacred Nature (https://www.danaan.net).



Druids and Witches Welcome Spring in Northern Virginia

By Jason Stieber

The Oak and Eagle OBOD seed group joined forces on March 21, 2015 with The Firefly House, one of the Washington, D.C. metro area's largest Wiccan organizations, to celebrate Ostara and Alban Eilir in ecumenical fashion. Over 40 people participated in the event. The two organizations met at Lake Accotink Park in Fairfax County, V.A. to call the quarters together and welcome spring. This ritual was the third annual collaboration between the groups and was followed by feasting, merriment, and Eisteddfod.

© Norma Zarpak

The promontory near the public pavilions in Fairfax County, VA provided a dramatic setting for the ritual, a blend of Wiccan and Druid elements.

© Jason Stieber

Oak and Eagle member Powyl ap Gwenydd served as ritual Guardian, employing his imposing "bedpost staff" outside of the circle.

© Jason Stieber

Firefly High Priest David Salisbury and Oak and Eagle organizer Nicole Franklin make announcements and prepare to exchange traditional gifts of mead and crafts between the allied groups. The two organizations have made plans to meet again next spring.

ABOUT CAMP NEWS

Participation in OBOD camps in the Americas has grown exponentially over the years with the first gathering on the West Coast in 2009. We now have three regular major camps in the United States: the annual Gulf Coast Gathering at Alban Eilir, the annual East Coast Gathering at Alban Elfed, and the occasional West Coast Gathering at Lughnasadh. A huge number of folks are discussing starting other gatherings. If you are part of this movement, please let us in the Around the Americas department know. And for those that want to help or attend, stay tuned!

THE LAUNCH OF THE OBOD GULF COAST GATHERING AT ALBAN EILIR 2015

BY KATHLEEN HARRINGTON AND ART SCARBROUGH

Alban Eilir in March, 2015, was the setting for the birth of the newest OBOD camp in North America, the Gulf Coast Gathering (GCG) organized by Louisiana's Highland Oak Nemeton Grove. Nestled on the north shore of Lake Pontchatrain, Fontainebleau State Park was host to around 40 Bards, Ovates, and Druids who traveled from as far away as southern Canada and the United Kingdom to spend time in community.

© Kathleen Harrington

The Seven Sisters live oak in Mandeville, LA. OBOD Tutor Coordinator Susan Jones (left) stands under the expanse of its branches.

The theme of the inaugural GCG was "Making Druidry Your Own." Nicole Youngman, an academic sociologist by trade, spoke on adapting the Wheel of the Year to your individual area. She also spoke later on sex and gender in Paganism. Dana Wiyninger gave a lovely talk on creating a local Ogham while celebrated Druid blogger John Beckett talked about daily spiritual practice. In addition, there were seminars on mead-making and a panel discussion on how to start a grove or seed group while avoiding the pitfalls. A lot of conversation also focused on the personalization of Druidry in our individual lives.

The charming young Canadian author Brendan Meyers made a special trip to the far South to speak on Pagan ethics and philosophy. His thorough mastery of the subject matter and fantastic delivery made his talks both entertaining and highly informative. Brendan's books are a must for every Druid's bookshelf! We can also vouch for the fact that he's an excellent companion and storyteller around the fire late in the evening.

Group initiations were held for Bards and Ovates during the course of the camp. As always, there is a special magic associated with an OBOD group initiation that acknowledges and confirms the freedom of the initiate whilst cementing a beautiful bond with other OBODies from around the world.

One of our absolute, all-time favorite friends from OBOD headquarters in the United Kingdom, Tutor Coordinator Susan Jones, held both individual and group meetings, including a special talk on how to make the Bardic grade your own. Susan's keen grasp of human nature, coupled with her firm understanding of OBOD, ensured that everyone came away with a better understanding of how the course works and how it can best serve to enhance individual lives.

Two special outings were arranged for participants. The first was to the North Shore Nature Center, where hikers were given an up close and personal look at the local ecosystem. Led by Youngman, a certified master naturalist, the walk and talk gave everyone who attended a great introduction to that part of Louisiana.

The second outing was to visit a tree—but not just any tree. About the same time that King Icel left Germany to conquer and settle in Mercia, a live oak acorn in Louisiana sprouted. Over the next 1,500 years, the kings of Mercia faded into history; however, the live oak that sprouted that day still lives. The "Seven Sisters Oak" is the oldest and largest live oak in the United States and as such is the president of the Live Oak Society ("Seven Sisters Oak," 2015). Located on private property in Mandeville, LA, the Seven Sisters is most often viewed from afar; however, by special permission, GCG participants were allowed close and personal access to the tree.

GCG ended on Sunday morning with a closing ritual, which included consigning a single rose petal from the OBOD 50th celebration at Stonehenge to the earth and spirits of our ritual area. Thus, a newly formed family of friends joined in spirit with OBODies from around the world, did indeed swear by peace and love to stand—heart to heart and hand to hand. It was an honor and a privilege for Highland Oak to host this amazing gathering.

References

Seven Sisters Oak. (2015). American Forests. Retrieved from https://www.americanforests.org/bigtrees/tree-tales/seven-sisters-oak

Kathleen Harrington is a Druid Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids from Baton Rouge, LA. Retired from Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine, she divides her time between working with three local non-profit organizations, Highland Oak Nemeton, the Baton Rouge Unit of the Herb Society of North America, and the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge, and catering to the whims of her seven cats.

Art Scarbrough is a Druid Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids and has been a member since the late 1990s. Over the years, he has served various leadership and coordination roles for the OBOD message board and the East Coast Gathering OBOD camp. He is also the founding member of the Highland Oak Nemeton Grove in Baton Rouge.

OBOD EAST COAST GATHERING 2015 SELLS OUT IN 24 HOURS

BY LORRAINE SORIA

Registration for the 2015 OBOD U.S. East Coast Gathering (ECG), the sixth annual event, sold out in 24 hours. This year's gathering in September will feature special guests OBOD's Pendragon Damh the Bard, artist Cerri Lee, and Anglesey Druid Order Head Kristoffer Hughes.

The theme of ECG 2015 will be "Exploring Ritual" through workshops presented by many of our long-time attendees. We will drink mead, sing songs, build fabulous fires, and celebrate in relationship with each other. This is a time for us to put aside the cares of the mundane world and explore our craft while cradled in the arms of nature.

Camp Netimus has been ECG's home since its inception in 2010. Built in 1930, the site is a residential camp for girls during the summer. With 400 wooded acres in the Pocono Mountains, it has ample room for our activities, and it has plenty of places to get away from it all for quiet meditation or nature walks. In northeast Pennsylvania, the Pocono Mountains, commonly referred to as "the Poconos," has been a popular vacation spot since the 1920s. The numerous glacial lakes, hiking trails, and vibrant fall colors have enticed visitors to experience nature to the fullest. Is it any wonder that this would be chosen as the perfect location for an annual OBOD camp?

Although the ECG is sold out, please visit our website to add your name to the waiting list. We hope you see you there!

Lorraine Soria is a Druid Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. The camp director founded the East Coast Gathering in 2010.

© Renu K. Aldrich

CAMP NETIMUS

© Renu K. Aldrich

EVENT LISTING

EVENTS ACROSS THE AMERICAS

Seattle Druid Social Meetups hosted by The Circle of Coll

June 17, July 15, and Aug 19

Have a drink and/or meal. Join the Circle of Coll and other Druid types for good conversation, good company, and good fun. New meetup members are especially welcome! The event is free, but please patronize the establishment where we meet. Details: https://www.facebook.com/groups/circleofcoll.

Alban Hefin

June 20, Ann Arbor, MI

Keepers of Dragon Knowledge Grove is hosting OBOD-inspired seasonal festival celebrations. Events will be held outdoors (weather-permitting) at a stone circle in a private yard. The ritual is based on standard OBOD ritual with a few modifications for local flora and fauna, and is followed by a pot-luck supper and general merriment. Open to OBOD members and others interested in Druidry. Free. More information: kdkgrove@gmail.com.

Alban Hefin with the Circle of Coll

June 20, Seattle

Join the Circle of Coll for a celebration of the Summer Solstice, the time of maximum sun—when nature revels in colorful and fragrant splendor all around us. It is a time of journeying deep into the heart of the greenwood. The event is free, but please bring with you a zest for new life, an open heart, and a healthy snack to share after. We will hold an Eisteddfod following the rite, where we share poetry, music, stories, or other fruits of our own divine creativity. Details: https://www.facebook.com/groups/circleofcoll.

The 69th Annual Pacific Northwest Scottish Highland Games and Clan Gathering

July 25–26, 2015

Come on down to the Bards' Tent at the Seattle Scottish Highland Games to hear the old stories and tales of Fionn mac Cumhail, the Tuatha Dé Dannan, and other mythological luminaries as told by members of the Circle of Coll, The Bards of Caer Pugetia, and the Order of the White Oak. We will be hanging out in the tent all day, both days, so come at any time and chill with us as long as you like. In the Scottish Heritage Tent, join local Druid Moss Magill in an exploration of the Celtic warriors who lived both in the physical world and in the world of myth. Find out why fearless champions like Cú Chulainn and the Tuatha Dé Danann were revered by the ancient Celts as well as by neo-polytheists and Celtophiles of today. Check http://www.sshga.org/home.htm for details and admission fees.

Lughnasadh

Aug 1, Ann Arbor, MI

Keepers of Dragon Knowledge Grove is hosting OBOD-inspired seasonal festival celebrations. Events are held outdoors (weather-permitting) at a stone circle in a private yard. The ritual is based on standard OBOD ritual with a few modifications that take into account the local flora and fauna, and is followed by a pot-luck supper and general merriment. Open to OBOD members and others interested in Druidry. No cost to attend. For further information contact Barbara or Gail at kdkgrove@gmail.com.

Druid Magic & Healing with Philip Carr-Gomm

Oct 17, East Aurora, NY

This one-day workshop with Philip Carr-Gomm will explore the way the old stories, and the sacred animals and plants used in Druidry, can help in our healing and spiritual development. We will work with the Druid Animal and Plant Oracles, and music and meditation, to deepen our experience of the gift of being alive in the world today. Along the way, participants will learn about the way Druids work with healing and the subtle powers of nature to effect change and healing in their lives. Cost $120 (concession $100). Click **here** for info. Register: events@druidry.org.

Life Alchemy with Philip Carr-Gomm

Oct. 18, East Aurora, NY

This workshop intensive will bring new energy and transformation into your life. To open to our full potential, to move joyously into a new phase of our lives, and to help embrace change while letting go of old patterns—these are the aims of this one-day "Life Alchemy" intensive led by Philip Carr-Gomm. Cost $120 (concession $100). Click here for info. Register: events@druidry.org.

SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS

In Memoriam

Michael J. Paoli

Artist, musician, poet, librarian; Michael was brilliant and full of life, when he entered a room you could feel something magical might happen, it was as if the circus had come to town and the elephant parade was about to begin. He was a wonderful brother and a loyal friend; he will be desperately missed by all who knew him.

Mike's great passion was music; he played in several bands and performed his songs at venues all across the valley. He loved to be in front of an audience and he could hold a crowd with his stage presence and dynamic performance. Mike graduated from the University of Utah with degrees in anthropology and sociology. He continued his education at University College Dublin in Dublin, Ireland where he completed a Master's degree in library science. He worked for many years at the main branch of the Salt Lake City library in the circulation and reference departments.

© Diego Perbellini

Michael John Paoli
9/23/1952 – 5/24/2015

These few paragraphs cannot possibly capture the full breadth of Mike's life, those who knew him are fortunate to have memories of their time together.

Mike is survived by his sister Michele, brothers Brian and Bruce, Uncle Lucky and Aunt Leona, his beloved dog Jack, nieces, nephews, cousins, and countless friends and bandmates who loved him dearly and unconditionally. He was preceded in death by his mother Bebe, father August, and younger brother Duane.

The family would like to thank Michael's community of friends for their support, compassion, and help during this sad time. Please share your thoughts and memories on his Facebook page.

~ By the Paoli Family

~By Adam, Marty, & Gianni Pietrella

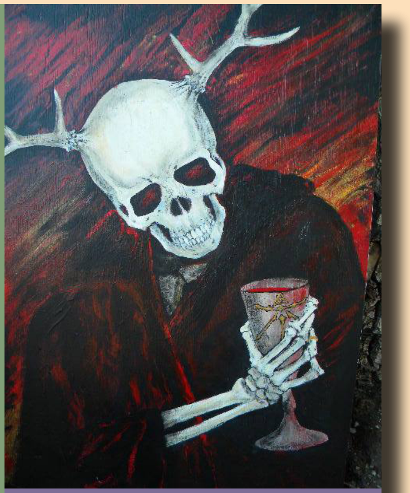
Our dear friend, brother, poet, artist, musician, punk godfather, and arbiter elegantiarum Sir Michael Paoli; Wulfgar Frosig, the Maenyr of Cromlech has crossed over into the Summerland.

Michael was a true warrior poet; a Brahman bull of a man who charged through life with as much zeal and gusto as he could manage. Whether he was playing on stage, writing an epic poem, creating a piece of art or simply getting through the day, he did so with as much passion and heart as anyone.

He was a brother and a true friend to many, and an inspiration and confidant to countless people. After 62 years serving as bodhisattva to his fellow comrades, Michael has now gone on to Valhalla where he is singing loud and long into the endless night and drinking from the skulls of his enemies.

We will miss you brother.

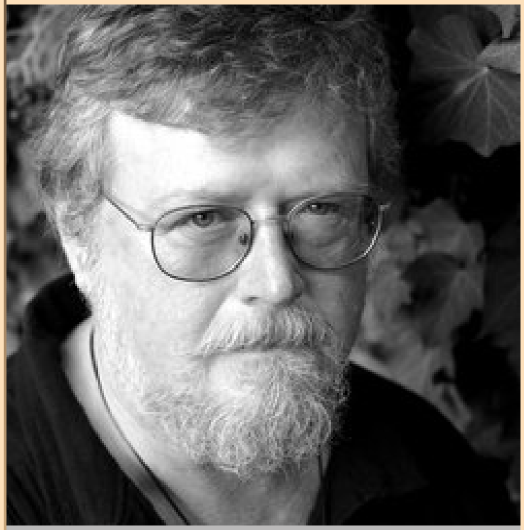
"Lay that pistol down boy, lay that pistol down...."


Michael Paoli painting of Cernunnos in his role as Dis-Pater.

JAMES L. BIANCHI

BY MICHAEL R. GORMAN

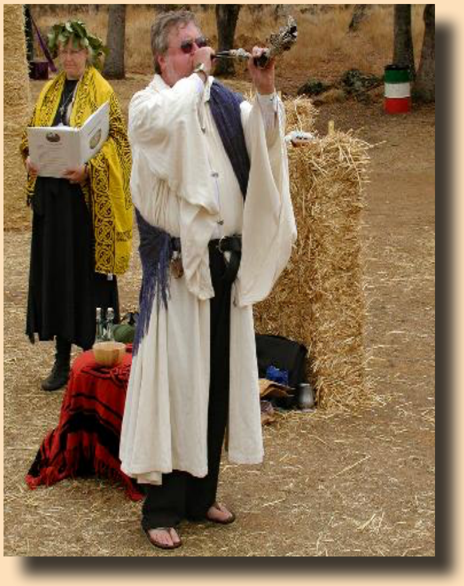
James L. Bianchi, of Benicia, California on the eastern shores of the San Francisco Bay, was a lawyer, social justice activist, musician, drummer, artist, videographer, and Druid with the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids as well as Árn-Draíocht Féin (ADF). He passed away May 11 from an infection that attacked his heart. He crossed over surrounded by his wife and children and many of his dedicated friends and co-laborers of the spirit.



James L. Bianchi (1949 – 2015)

James was a founding member of The House of Danu, a network for OBOD Druids and groves in the Western United States and a co-founder of The Bay Area Pagan Alliance. His social justice activism began with his work with potential draftees during the Vietnam War, and his advocacy for returning Veterans after the war. He continued his work for the underserved, the poor, the homeless, and the victims of discrimination throughout the rest of his life. He was on the faculty of the Cherry Hill Seminary, a seminary in California for Pagan clergy, and he was a tireless advocate for Pagan chaplaincy in California's prisons. He was one of the planners of the very first Druid ritual at the annual and well-respected west coast Pagan conference Pantheacon, and continued to actively participate as a leading Druid presence each year. He was well known and respected in the interfaith community in the Bay Area as well as working extensively with Taliesin Grove, Manannán Mac Lir Grove, The Sacramento Grove of the Oak, Duir Brighid Grove, and many other west coast Druid groves and OBOD seed groups.

James performed with other musicians at the annual Spiral Dance sponsored by the Reclaiming Collective of San Francisco, and he drummed, played flute, and danced with the Danse Macabre troupe and accompanied various fire dancing troupes at numerous festivals and events around the state. He was a founding participant in the Sacramento Celtic Midsummer Faerie Festival, The Celtic New Year Festival, The Pagan Pride Harvest Festival, The House of Danu Gorsedd, and the Berkeley Pagan Pride Parade and Festival. His dedication to on-going community building and community service, his constant bridge-building, his understanding of the power of the arts to teach and to heal, and his love of all things Druid were an inspiration to Druids and other Pagans who knew him for decades.



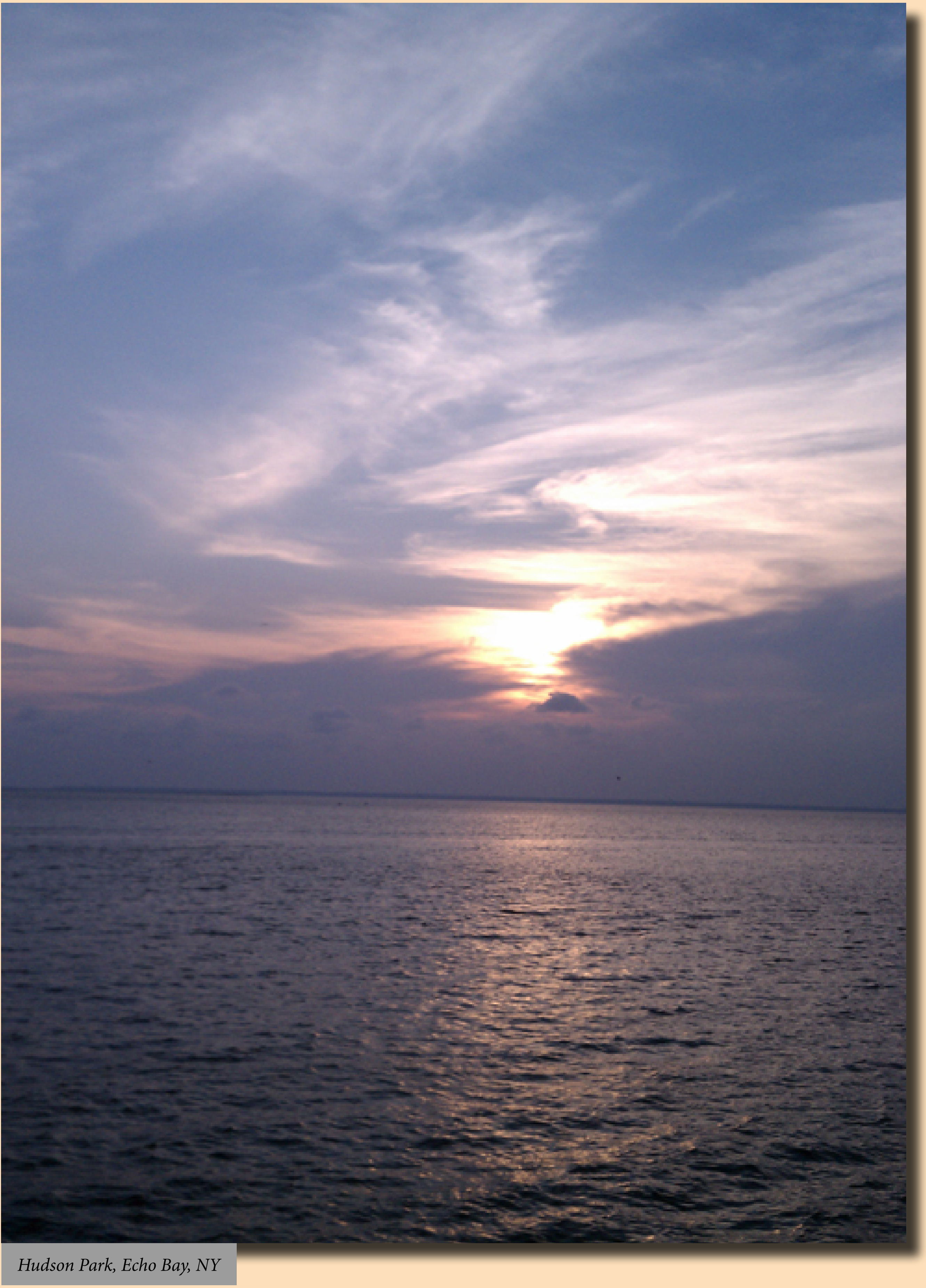
Autumn

by Michael Paoli

Would that I were a leaf
To be borne up by Heaven's breath
Where I would like a dervish dance
And in crackling notes
of laughter sing
Until at last I fall
Upon my lover's snowy breast

ISAAC BONEWITS

Please **submit** your stories about Isaac for the fall issue, where we will pay tribute to one of the most influential American Druids of our time.



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Hudson Park, Echo Bay, NY

My Druid Journey

By Sarah Fuhro

Black Face

Eat out of my hand, little wild soul,
crazy squirrel, black face singer.
The singer who is my sister is dark, dark.
The hand I extend to the wild animal
is white, white.

I hear the sound of the tinkling bell.
It cracks the silence.

I am like the baby chick
who knows when to break
the perfect architecture
of my isolation.

And I peck my way out,
but not until I am strong enough
to break through can I break through.

The acorn is also an egg.
The chick inside is the king
of the forest.

The oak climbs to the heights
that equal the journey of the sun.

I am looking for the acorns
to feed the wild pigs
in the forest,
and I am black of face,
and white of hand,
and my bell calls my animals.

I make a fire.
and from the charcoal,
the burnt bones of the oak,
hatched from my acorn,
I blacken my face once again.

(Sarah Fuhro, 1991)

I joined OBOD in 1990 after attending a seminar that Philip Carr-Gomm taught in America. I did so reluctantly because I was involved with so many projects that to begin a study of Druidry seemed doomed to failure. A friend had started the course and wanted someone to join her in ritual. What a fateful decision that was for me!

© Sarah Fuhro

In a city park carved from an old estate, my friend and I would stand under a circular domed pergola, a remnant of better days, and recite the words from her newly received Gwers. I invited my tarot students to join us, and soon we had full circles of people hungry for connection to seasonal celebrations!

Now I had my own blue Gwersi arriving monthly; and at Beltane I flew off to Iona for a Druid retreat with Philip, and Stephanie Carr-Gomm, and four or five other “druidy Druids” as James Joyce writes (1986, p. 7). Iona has tremendous energetic forces at work that I felt the moment my foot touched the shore. I saw rain and fire with death everywhere around me. I understood that time has no meaning.

And here’s where it gets complicated and very personal when we talk about being an “American Druid.”

I have always had a deep connection to the earth, plants and animals, weather, and the stars. Druidry taught me a way to converse with all of these things—to hear, but also to speak with them. I believe these are similar experiences for all people who live close to the earth, and that the indigenous people of my home country, in the region we call New England, were involved in much of the same relationship to the “magical” and lively spirit of the land as were the pre-Christian and pre-industrial age people of the British Islands. I think all of this history is layered into our psyches and bodies, and yearns for expression. I have always wondered if the Salem Witch Trials have such a deep hold on our imagination because, in fact, some people in Salem were reconnecting to very old spiritual pathways in deep conflict with Puritan repression.

The Cauldron Comes to the New World

The cauldron flew over the ocean
to the New World:
That's where we live, New York,
New England, New Jersey.

She sailed through
the good weather and bad.
The ducks and geese who saw her fly,
were surprised, troubled,
they spoke of it on the ground
in hushed wonder,
"Don't let the children hear"

The cauldron landed
in a pine and birch grove.

It was raining—sore throat weather.
Her short black legs sunk into soft earth.
She came as so many had
Not really knowing why,
needing to be here, wanting to be here.
She felt worn out and used up
And ready to start over.

An old gypsy woman with a ripped boot
found the cauldron.
She lifted her up with a shout:
"Hey, look at this! See what I found!"

And so the story began.

(Sarah Fuhro, 1991)

What is in the cauldron, which came from the Old World? And what fills the Cauldron after it arrived from the New World, where she landed?

Some of what we, who live here in the "New World," experience as Druidry comes from the earth where we stand and walk. It comes from the spirits of those who lived on these lands before Europeans, and bubbles up from the stones, the plants, and the ways of the animals who live here.

Some of it is brought over from the Old World, in waves of immigration, either voluntary or forced, from every continent, through words and experience with the history we have consciously chosen to identify as our spiritual practice, Druidry. Druidry is filled with recent history as well as ancient, grown from interest in the indigenous cultures of Africa and Asia, injected with Shamanism from Central and South America, filled with the wonders of aboriginal Dream Time, and the discovery of animism from Caribbean Islands and liberated from monotheistic thought processes by deep acquaintance with pantheism.

© Sarah Fuhro

Druidry has been, for me, a framework to view the world in all of its visible and invisible forms. It has provided a loom for me to weave my love of art, poetry, the natural world, astrology, history, and politics into one tapestry.

After 25 years of Druid practice and joyful companionship with those who share this cauldron with me here and around the world, I find myself becoming more and more concerned about our role as allies with the earth. Do we have a particular responsibility beyond celebration? When Nuinn came to Philip on February 14, 1988 to suggest he reopen the Order because it was 'needed now,' was there not a certain urgency in his suggestion? Or, is it more important to tap the earth spirits as allies, and build our lives around the reconnection to the land where we live, New or Old World? Of course there is room for all this…building a miniature Stonehenge in our back garden, and shaking the bars of corporate rule of earth, sea, and sky.

Question:

Whimper till the end?

Does a death wish
add, or divide me
from the disappearance
of a thousand species?

Must I hope my human family
ends swiftly, suddenly,
so a last bird, and one mountain
remain unharmed,
under the virgin Moon?

How can there be a flag,
and a golf course,
on the face of her,
who watches us,
and brings the tides to
our fast dissolving shore?

We are neither good nor bad.
The executive who orders
the clear cut of an entire forest
may be kind to his tiny child.

Watch the shadow as it grows.
Hear the pain of a moose
filled with tumors,
from the tar sands oil,
belched into the waters
of his boreal home.

Moose, so easy to find,
great head and thigh,
they walked past me,
with slow knuckle crack steps.

In twenty years, moose
gone, with his lost home.

Why not
quit early, leave swiftly,
like the moose, before
the late Moon sets
in the dawn sky?

(Sarah Fuhro, 2015)

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Sarah Fuhro is a practitioner of ancient wisdom in many forms, including astrology, tarot, flower essences, and Druidry. In addition to personal consultations, Sarah teaches workshops and private classes, offering both clients and students knowledge powerfully rooted in the past, presented in the language of the present. To learn more, please visit www.sarahfuhro.com.

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On Being An American Druid

Blood Roots

By Kevin Emmons

In 2006, I was invited to attend a ritual called "Naraya: A Dance For All People" in New York State. Naraya is a tradition that comes from the native peoples of the Great Basin/ Plateau, the Shoshone-Bannock tribes. The Naraya community had reached out to the Druid community, extending an invitation to my teacher, Bobcat (the spiritual name of Emma Restall Orr), who resides in England. As Bobcat was unable to attend, the invitation came to me to represent our community.

© Kevin Emmons

Kevin Emmons meditating by the Saco River

The Naraya is a very welcoming and powerful ritual of prayer, song, and healing. According to the Dance of All People website, Naraya is a ritual to "perpetuate the healing and renewal of Mother Earth and all her beings around the Tree of Life" (Dance for All People, 2015, para. 1). In the center of the ritual space is a living tree. There are complex and beautiful altars, bundles, fire, and a sand painting. I won't pretend to have any knowledge of the meaning, history, and significance of each element outside of the obvious, and what was shared openly. Naraya is a powerful visionary ritual and a great gift to the world. I was honored to be invited.

© Kevin Emmons

The beautiful autumn colors of Maine

When I arrived, I was surprised by the intensity of the welcome I received. The New York Naraya is a three-day ritual. Outside of the active ritual portions, person after person sat with me and asked questions about Druidry, our philosophy, rituals, and spiritual practices. It was exhilarating. I was also greatly honored to be asked to address the entire Naraya gathering after the dancing and sharing ended on one of the evenings. I did my best to offer something of value, words that might build a bridge between our communities, helping those of European descent to find their personal ancestral roots, their "Blood Roots." I spoke about how, in spite of our ancient Druid traditions being lost in history, they actually lived on in the myths and stories our ancestors found a way to pass on to us. I also spoke of the marks our ancestors left on the landscape—those marks, teaching us much about their relationship to community, the land, and the gods.

It was wonderful to see such an interest in Druidry within the Naraya community, and to have ancestry become a bridge between their community and ours. After talking with so many people, I came to an understanding. Most people who work within a nature-based religion or spirituality find they need to be fully present and awake to be able to walk their path with a sense of honor. To forge communion, meaning sacred relationship with the land, the people, and the gods, requires this wakeful presence. When people dive into this work, they often find two aspects to presence—place and time.

Connection to place is the more obvious one. It starts with showing up and extending our invitation to the spirits of place in order to engage in meaningful relationship. This immediate relationship with the spirits of place, those of earth, water, and sky, roots us into the environment, to the land, weaving a connection to place. This is what we call "mud roots." This is the easy part of presence.

The second part of presence involves time. We can be in a place, yet have our attention elsewhere. Simply recall times when you were half-listening during a phone call, or daydreaming in the middle of a conversation. You were physically present, but your thoughts, emotions, dreams, and aspirations were elsewhere. This is a function of time, when we are not in the moment. To bring ourselves fully present in the moment requires that we not only have strong mud roots, we must have strong blood roots as well.

© Michael E. Berube

A simple Imbolc altar

Blood roots are our connection and relationship to our ancestors, those spirits of our genetic line who gifted us our personal heritage. This takes some work, but it is vital to being fully present and walking with a sense of knowing oneself—where you came from, where you are, and where you are going. The word "being" involves an aspect of time. Our work with our ancestors brings all of our being into play. So, as we step onto the path of experiential spirituality, at some point we find we need to have strong bloods roots that hum with life, informing us as to who we are and why we are as we are. Only then can we have an understanding of our behaviors, reactions, emotions, strengths, and weaknesses.

The ancestors teach us that this is our time, our moment to live. With our feet firmly rooted to the Earth, acknowledging and honoring all the spirits of place, with our souls fully rooted in our ancestral heritages, we can be fully present, engaging with our whole beings in hopes of forging relationships that are soul deep, honorable, equitable—sacred relationships.

As I engaged with the Naraya community, I found so many people of European heritage who had awakened to their ancestral roots. During the ritual, prayers and songs are gifted to the ancestors. Such is the power of this rite that the songs are heard and the ancestors come to dance with their progeny. The ancestors who come are of all races and nationalities. And the people recognize the need to make good relationship, to have strong roots humming with the flow of spirit. The natural extension of that need was to reach out across the ocean to the land of their ancestors and find their own indigenous spirituality—to find a way to better honor those spirits who come to dance with their children—hence the invitation to our community.

The intense work at the Naraya rituals and daily practices had awakened in many the need to understand their own personal story, recognizing the need of both strong mud roots and blood roots to find perfect presence, to be fully present in time and place. From that place, Awen flows.

As Druids seeking to craft sacred relationships with the lands we live in, we all will come to this place of trying to understand perfect presence. I haven't met a Pagan person, in this land or across the ocean, who isn't actively seeking relationship with their ancestors. This work is innate. It is powerful. It is difficult.

Our ancestors start with our parents. Sadly, for many, their relationships with their parents were not healthy or loving. Even if those relationships are good, it is only the starting point. We have to go deeper into our bloodline. All of us will find ancestors who were not honorable people. I believe that in everyone's bloodline there are cowards, murderers, rapists, pedophiles, thieves, and liars. We must find acceptance for these parts of our bloodlines, just the same as we find acceptance for all those beautiful souls who were kind, loving, wise, brilliant, and spiritually awake, and walked lives filled with honor. We must accept it all, knowing all the potential of our ancestors is our spiritual inheritance. How we each walk this life is a story yet to be told. Walk with honor. Walk in beauty. Walk fully present rooted in the Earth, knowing who you are, so you can consciously craft who you will become. Walk with mud and blood roots humming with life, so all your relationships are filled with Awen. This is my hope—to live a life that my ancestors will be proud to witness.

Snowhawke (a.k.a. Kevin Emmons) is a Druid priest living in southern Maine. He is a co-founder of the Druid College (a priesthood level training organization), and is actively involved with pagan prison ministry, leading public ritual, and teaching and mentoring apprentices in his role as priest.

© Kevin Emmons

A DRUID'S COMPASS

BY DEAN EASTON

Sometimes it takes another country to teach you lessons about your own. Four summers ago, while I was teaching English for a month in Seoul, Korea, I encountered a local land spirit who showed me that this lovely country I'd just begun to discover was not my home. It was about a week after I'd joined OBOD and requested the Bardic course. It was also my last weekend to explore before I flew back to the United States to wait for that first of a series of welcome brown envelopes with the British postmarks.

So, on a foggy Sunday morning, I made my way by train toward Inwangsan, a sacred mountain a handful of kilometers from my one-room apartment in Seoul, and then on foot into the mist. Outside Dingninmun Station, I managed to miss the tourist signs and markers under the overcast sky, but the mountain loomed nearby, unmistakable, so I began my ascent off trail, figuring I'd intersect it higher up, near where a Buddhist and shamanic shrine coexist peacefully. Inwangsan is famous for its commanding views and granite cliffs. I had little hope for a view on this gray day, but exposed granite slabs and outcroppings shone slick in the rain.

Forty-five minutes of climbing later, wet, muddy, and annoyed with myself, I paused to catch my breath. The fog had thickened, but the rising slope was still a reliable guide for the direction that I wanted to go. I took a step, and—how to describe it?—up rose a wall of resistance in front of me. Something challenged me and barred my way from further ascent. At first I thought, stubborn and oblivious as I can be, that it was merely the tug of my own fatigue, but when I took another step, it was clear this issued from something other than me. The hair on my arms stood up. Heart pounding, I apologized out loud, mumbled the few phrases of polite Korean I knew, turned around and slogged back down. What was it? I rarely see anything inwardly in such situations, but impressions came this time as I made my way off the slopes. Something with multiple arms, big as a pickup truck, banded in stripes of dark and light, and determined I would advance no further. I've not written about this till now, and just putting it into words makes the feel of it march again up and down my spine, vivid as if it happened this morning, a heavy scent of wet earth, a tang of juniper and Asian pine and dead leaves. Yet, I'd forgotten the mountain's name, and the train station's, too, and had to consult my journal from that summer. That, as much as anything, reminds me yet again (as if I need any further sign) of my "outlander" status there: I do not know the proper names for things.

© Dean Easton

East/uphill along the north border of the author's property in Westminster, VT

* * * * *

After British poet Rupert Brooke visited the Rocky Mountains some hundred years ago on a North American tour, he wrote: "There walk, as yet, no ghosts of lovers in Canadian lanes … it is possible, at a pinch, to do without gods. But one misses the dead" (Brooke, 2004, para. 7). Brooke was young—it was just a few years before his untimely death at age 27—and he wrote with a young Bard's flip ignorance to cloak his discomfort with an unfamiliar country. For of course ghosts walk this continent, millions of them. Brooke simply hadn't yet listened closely enough. But new landscapes often strike us that way. A Chinese proverb I heard while working in The People's Republic of China sums it up handily: shui tu bu fu—"earth and water aren't comfortable." We don't yet know them, and neither do they know us. But stay in a place long enough, sweat and sleep there, plant and harvest, raise families and bury your dead, and the land begins to learn you, too, and to recognize you. And, as you work out names for the shapes of water and earth you find in the neighborhood, and come to greet the stones and trees as friends, the words get shaped by mouths that eat and drink there, by lungs that take in the local air.

In the way of Bards, another who grappled with the same challenge comes to answer Brooke's verses with words of his own. At 87, Robert Frost was asked to deliver a poem for President Kennedy's inauguration in January, 1961. The day dawned cold and bright, and with his poor vision and the sun in his eyes, Frost couldn't read the words in front of him. So the old Bard made do with memory instead and recited another of his poems.

"The land was ours before we were the land's," he begins in "The Gift Outright" (Frost, 1975, p. 348). How often a Bard finds a way through error and trial and Awen. Frost continues, naming an experience common enough among American Druids, who may strive to honor a rich heritage originating east of the Atlantic while also heeding new-old voices here on what some First Peoples called Turtle Island:

> But we were England's, still colonials,
> Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
> Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
> Something we were withholding made us weak
> Until we found out that it was ourselves …
> (Frost, 1975, p. 348)

Here, in what homesick settlers called New England, older names still linger for things no one truly possesses. Within an hour from where I live in Vermont, you can find Mt. Monadnock, Mt. Ascutney, Wantastiquet Trail, Skatutakee and Nubanusit lakes. Anywhere you go on this continent, similar names and undercurrents whisper, and careful listening will repay any effort to attend to lore and myth and what the land wights may have to say. Sometimes, it takes long patience to regain their trust if careless previous inhabitants squandered it. Sometimes, it takes longer practice to stop withholding ourselves from our places.

Here in Vermont, the Yankee accent and sensibility rises like spring water after long winters, like sap from local trees boiled to syrup. They grow from the pork of free-range pigs that graze the oak mast on Windmill Hill, which we can see from our living room window. They leaf and branch from Okemo State Forest not much more distant. "Eating local" needn't be mere marketing of another yuppie indulgence. It's what we all did until just a handful of generations ago, growing it ourselves, letting the land feed our bellies and spirits. And it makes sense if you're committed to any kind of Druidry, because the taste and smell of home, and of a new place, too, can be powerful guides. The body leads the way by a kind of homing instinct.

Names, listening, tastes, and smells. What of ritual and ceremony? Once my wife and I settled in Vermont, walking to learn my neighborhood became a go-to practice for me, with a three-mile loop of dirt roads my almost-daily ceremonial. When I honor the four quarters, I see the fishpond east of our house, which the former owners had stocked with carp, and I remember water-of-air. The cold fronts each winter sweep down from Canada: air-of-earth. And with a hill named for a grove of Hemlocks to our east beyond the pond that obscures the horizon, we never get much in the way of sunrises, but dramatic sunsets make up for it: fire-of-water. Online, you can still track down Mike Nichols' Wiccan classic "Re-thinking the Watchtowers: Thirteen Reasons Air Should Be in the North" (1989); it's now a "sacred text" itself though it started out as an observed deviation from traditional practice. Rules change with places, but ancient patterns abide.

Dean Easton

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE...

Susan Jones shares how OBOD's worldwide mentor network developed

On Being An American Druid

A Traveler Without a Land

By Karen Marsh

Thousands of years ago, during the Iron Age, my Celtic ancestors migrated west across Europe from Nederlands to Deutschland. Some settled in Gaul, some in Albion, then in Alba, and finally in Eire, because they could go no further west on land. Four hundred years ago, my Celtic ancestors came on a ship from Albion to a place called “Lenapehoking” (Land of the Lenape), and 300 years ago, other Celtic ancestors from Nederlands arrived on the shores of “Quinnehtukqut” (Place of the Long River). They—along with other European invaders—took the lands that had once belonged to the Leni Lenape, Iroquois, and Seneca, and renamed them “New York,” “Pennsylvania,” and “Connecticut.” Two hundred years ago, my Celtic ancestors from Ireland and Scotland traveled to New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Massachusetts. Some settled there, and others continued their westward journey into Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and Kansas.

© Karen Marsh

Wood’s edge at the author’s home

Although my grandparents were great storytellers, my ancestors left them few written texts; much of our family history has been lost in time. What I know of them is only what can be found in official historic records: their names, occupations, births, deaths, and marriages, and whether they “owned” land in America. I know from those records that most of them lived close to the land or were skilled craftsmen who worked with their hands; they were farmers and millers, potters, wheelwrights, ministers, and shop owners. What they thought, how they felt, whether they felt the touch of the fae, practiced magic, knew the art of healing, or journeyed to the Otherworld, I don’t know; they were gone from their earthly existence long before I was born. I only know that they lived, loved and lost, cared for their children, grew their crops, fought in wars they didn’t start, had good days and bad days, and plied their chosen trades. I also know that the same Celtic blood that ran through their veins, and the veins of my ancestors from across the ocean, runs in my veins, too. Many of us born and raised in America do not have a specific ancestral home we can know as the “old country.” Perhaps we can name the county or clan from which our forebears came, but for the most part, the sense of place and deep connection to those faraway lands those ancestors knew is not part of our experience.

My parents and their parents were American-born and raised, and so am I. So, our thinking and behaviors are primarily American even though our ancestry is a mishmash of European, mostly Celtic tribes. Because most Americans are—or their families were—immigrants and our country’s European-American history (and therefore my own family history) spans only a period of 400 or so years, many of us also identify ourselves in terms of our ancestral roots—in my case, mostly “Celtic-of-one-sort-or-another.” But some families here, like mine, are not very good at "settling down." In fact, my family, as far back as many generations as I can go, has never been particularly interested in putting down permanent roots anywhere; we tended to move around a lot.

The daughter of a career Navy officer, I grew up without a hometown or sense of roots to any land other than America. We lived where the U.S. government told us to live, and we went where officials told my father to go. Before I was 18, I'd lived in seven different states, on two different coasts, visited 39 states, and driven or flown across the country 13 times. Since moving out of my parents' house 35 years ago, I've visited 10 additional states and lived in six others, including North Carolina, where I have been for 27 years. I have learned this land in many ways—but it is still not "my" land; it belongs to itself, and is colored by the much older traditions of earth-reverent tribes who are no longer here. Spirit of place and spirit of land are so important in the Druid tradition, and they present significant challenges to those of us who really have no land, who have many places but lack the "roots" and frame of reference to know them in the intimate ways that our Celtic ancestors knew their ancestral lands or how the indigenous people who were here before us, understood it.

© Karen Marsh

The author in her front yard

I am telling this as a way to set the stage for understanding the foundations of where my spiritual journey began and where it is going. I, like many, live my life in diaspora—a citizen of many places, but of no place in particular. My more recent "ancestral homes" are in many states, and further back in the generations in several different countries as I detailed earlier. Before we came here to the New World, we were Scottish, Irish, English, Welsh, French, German, Dutch, and many other nationalities—but now we are American. Before I moved here, North Carolina had never been inhabited by any of my blood-related ancestors; I'm the first of my family to move this far south, or spend any time here. So it is diaspora within diaspora within diaspora—not native to this country because my roots are European (but native to it because the blood of my American-born ancestors is here, as is the blood of my European-born ancestors who immigrated here); not native to any particular place in America or connected to any "ancestral home" here; and not native to this part of the country because I was born in California and raised all over the country.

Yet, North Carolina, which boasts the largest population of Scottish and Irish people in the United States, is my place, and is in many ways very much a Celtic land. When I found my way here, I didn't know that about 3% of the state's population claim Scots-Irish ancestry ("Scotch-Irish American," 2015)[1]. But as I have lived and loved here, I have learned that and become part of it myself. In the 1700s and 1800s, many Scottish and Irish immigrants fled the northern cities to find new homes, and there, in the wild lands, was a place for them. Eventually, many settled in Appalachia—the mountain range that runs from Mississippi, through Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and up into southern New York, where their culture continued, adapted, and flourished.

Perhaps in some ways those wild lands reminded them of their homeland with its rocky mountains, rugged landscapes, and untamed rivers, and lakes. Maybe the abundance of animals, and the sometimes cold and daunting weather reminded them of their faraway homes in Scotland and Ireland, or they could have felt in their very souls that many of the lands they came to inhabit were once sacred to the people who came before them, to the people whose last vestiges remained there, in hiding, long after they had been driven out of more "desirable" places? The mountain lands these Celts chose were far away from "civilization," and it took time for the rest of the world to find; because of their inaccessibility, they remained mostly unchanged for many generations.

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[1] Different terminologies exist for the same people, see http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotch-Irish_American

Celtic culture, music, art, and language flourished in the mountains and in other places in the liminal zones along the ancient pathways where the native people who had this land before us lived, wondered at, and worshipped the same kinds of land spirits and deities. We are a creative and artistic people, and what our ancestors brought with them merged with the music, art, and culture of the African slaves and the Lumbee, Cherokee, Catawba, and Tuscarora peoples. Here, in the wild backcountry, the tribes—Celtic, African, and Native—intermingled and mixed because they had to in order to survive. There, the stories told around the fire, and songs sung with or without the accompaniment of the fiddle, pipes, and drums, carried within them the rhythm and meter of the old ancestral Celtic songs and the ancestral songs of Africans and indigenous tribes. One cannot possibly listen to bluegrass music without hearing its Celtic roots, or watch clog dancing without seeing the same patterns seen in traditional Scottish and Irish dance.

Gradually, many of the "mountain Celts" here in North Carolina—and from other Celtic places—migrated east into the North Carolina Piedmont, where I now live. We Celts seem to be migratory by nature. There are many of us here now who came for more arable lands, jobs, family, or the benefits of living nearer to a city and other people. Celtic culture, particularly Scottish and Irish, underlies and permeates the whole state of North Carolina—we have many heritage festivals here, and Celtic folk music, dance, and performances by various Celtic groups are commonplace here, as are Irish-style pubs.

Yes, North Carolina is a Celtic land, and even though the spirits of this land aren't the same as those in Europe, they know we're here, and the place-spirits of rocks and rivers, mountains and trees listen, and have come to know us.

We hear them speak, and when they speak, we listen. And we come to understand.

References

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Karen Marsh is an Ovate Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids who has been actively involved with Awen's Light Grove in North Carolina since 2012. When not doing "Druid stuff," Karen focuses her attention on running her e-learning consulting business, crafting, gardening, and various DIY projects. She has two grown children, and she is eagerly awaiting the birth of her first grandchild in August, 2015.

Author's grove

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